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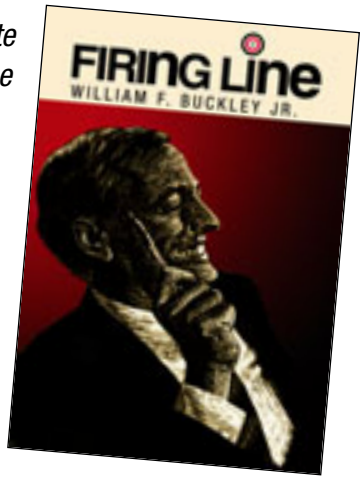

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Globaloney Updated

Like most Americans, The Scrapbook was surprised—and a little disappointed—that the job in the Obama administration that should have gone to Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*'s international editor, went instead to Hillary Clinton. We're sure that Senator Clinton will be an adequate secretary of state and help make us proud to be Americans again. But imagine a world in which Fareed Zakaria was our nation's top diplomat!

In fact, *Newsweek* had the same idea and as a public service asked Zakaria to write a cover essay last week entitled "How to Fix the World." Sure, there's a photograph of Barack Obama on the cover—striding purposefully onto an airplane, flying to Tehran?—but the "Global Agenda" (*Newsweek*'s term) for fixing the world is pure Zakaria.

There's not a syllable of policy prescription or specific advice or genuine content; but as we've always observed, when it comes to belaboring the obvious, or slinging hackneyed phrases, airy generalities, and all-purpose flatulence, nobody slings it like Secretary Zakaria.

If strategy is on President Obama's global agenda for hope, Zakaria has the concept down cold:

> Grand strategy sounds like an abstract concept . . . that bears little relationship to urgent, jarring events on the ground. But in the absence of strategy, any administration will be driven by the news, reacting rather than leading.

That's why strategy is so important, as he explains in stunning detail: Its absence leads to a vacuum:

> For a superpower that has global interests and is forced to respond to virtually every problem, it's all too easy for the urgent to drive out the important.

All too easy indeed. But as they say over in Foggy Bottom, that's pure Zakaria. You see, what The Scrapbook values about Secretary Zakaria is that he not only asks all the right questions, but he has all the right answers as well. Take strategy, again. His insights are not just theoretical; he puts the concepts into practice as well—and in such simple, compelling language that Hillary Clinton ought to paste these insights onto her new desk over at State:

> Any attempt at a grand strategy for today must also begin with an accurate appraisal of the world.

If the truth be told, The Scrapbook was a little saddened by reading "How to Fix the World" since it reminded us, all too uncomfortably, of the truths that the Bush White House routinely ignored. For instance:

> Any strategy that is likely to succeed in today's world will be one that has the active support and participation of many countries.

Or:

> Technology is increasing the pace of change. Such ferment is usually a recipe for instability.

Or even:

> In a world characterized by change, more and more countries—especially great powers like Russia and China and India—will begin to chart their own course. That in turn will produce greater instability.

So the key to fixing the world, in The Scrapbook's estimation, is to marry Senator Clinton's practical experience to Secretary Zakaria's wisdom and perspective, and bear in mind that—

> National rivalries, some will say, are in the nature of international politics. But that's no longer good enough.

No, it's not. Nor is Zakaria content to leave things vague—"some will say"—when a few choice proposals can make the difference between an increasingly dangerous and complex world, and a world that, while broken, may yet be fixed:

> A more responsive America, better attuned to the rest of the world, could help create a new set of ideas and institutions—an architecture of peace for the 21st century that would bring stability, prosperity, and dignity to the lives of billions of people.

Yes, the world has been seeking a formula for years—decades, even centuries—to usher in an age of stability, prosperity, and dignity. And Fareed Zakaria, in just one phrase, unlocks the secret: A more responsive America, better attuned to the rest of the world.

Why didn't we think of that? ♦

Dallek Reads the *Times*!

At a Washington, D.C., screening last week of the movie *Frost/Nixon* (about the late president's televised encounter with David Frost), director Ron Howard, James Reston (who worked for Frost), and historian Robert Dallek compared President Nixon to President Bush. Who could resist? According to the *Washington Times*, Dallek referred to the Bush years as "an imperial presidency. This has, I think, in a sense, made this film and the play so timely, and why it's really commanding so much attention."

It is? Chris Wallace took strong exception: "I think to compare what

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Nixon did, and the abuses of power for pure political self-preservation, to George W. Bush trying to protect this country—even if you disagree with rendition or waterboarding—it seems to me is both a gross misreading of history both then and now." The host of *Fox News Sunday* (who received a mix of applause and boos from the audience) concluded, "You're simply making suppositions based on no facts whatsoever."

Dallek's response (as reported in the *Washington Post*): "Oh come on! You read the *New York Times*." We do, too, as well as the *Onion*—sometimes they're hard to tell apart.

NPR's Daniel Schorr, now 92, also used the *Frost/Nixon* movie to make the Nixon/Bush comparison, and the long-time Nixon foe suggested that Tricky Dick, by apologizing for his illegal behavior, might have achieved higher moral standing than Bush.

> As I listened to Nixon on film, I thought of President Bush. While still in office, he is having to respond to questions of critics, but not only critics, as to whether he let the American people down, primarily by launching an invasion of Iraq in search of nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. Interviewed by Charles Gibson of ABC, the president said his greatest regret was the intelligence failure that led to the war. As to whether he would have gone to war if intelligence had been right, Mr. Bush said, that's a do-over that I can't do. But Mr. Bush's expressed inability to look back avoids the issue.

The problem, Schorr says, is that Bush lied the country into war in Iraq because he "was determined to find a target for American anger." This slander doesn't really deserve a response, but it's worth reminding Schorr that the United States had already overthrown the Taliban in Afghanistan and killed thousands of al Qaeda terrorists by the time of the Iraq war.

"As he prepares to leave office," Schorr said, "Mr. Bush might want to look at the Nixon interview and consider doing a do-over. That is reconsidering the wisdom of invading Iraq."

As long as we're making suggestions, NPR might want to consider a mandatory retirement policy.

Since it seems to be Nixon week in Washington, The Scrapbook is reminded of a line spoken by a character in one of Charles McCarry's great spy novels: "They have made Mr. Nixon stand for evil and they think that all it takes to be virtuous is to hate him. It is the sin of pride." ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'This book was born during a pan-Pacific dinner in Seattle in March 2007, with political journalist Michael Kinsley, Patty Stonesifer (Mike's wife), Susan Rieger (my wife), and me. Somewhere between the Singing Fish Satay and the Pow Wok Lamb, Mike and I, for some reason, said more or less the same thing . . . " (from *Snark: It's Mean, It's Personal, and It's Ruining Our Conversation*, by David Denby). ♦

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Casual

Comic Relief

While the financial crisis has gripped the rest of the world, my investments have been doing quite well. Not my traditional investments, mind you. My house is worth a fraction of what I paid for it in 2004, and my 401(k) is more like a 201(k) these days.

But four years ago I started putting a bit of money into comic books. It didn't start out as a financial endeavor. I had collected comics as a child and started reading them again on a whim. This casual reading became something more serious, and before I knew it I was following a couple dozen titles. Which turns out to have been the smartest financial move I've made.

I can't tell you how much I've invested in funny books. This is a family magazine, and besides, my wife reads it. But through sly purchasing I've managed a reasonable ROI—maybe 3 percent in the aggregate.

For instance, I went very long on Joss Whedon's comic-book adaptation of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I thought it would find an audience with both comic-book readers and fans of the TV series, so I bought several copies of issue #1 for $2.99 apiece. Mile High Comics in Denver, which helps set prices for the industry, sells them for $40 now, although you can get a copy for $20 every once in a while. I even had the foresight to pick up a particularly rare edition, the #1 RRP cover. (Many comics these days are published with different covers of varying rarity.) Only 1,000 of the RRP edition were printed, and they go for between $200 and $400, when you can find them.

Encouraged by the success of my *Buffy* buys, I went long again when Whedon launched a spin-off title, *Angel: After the Fall*. Again, I bought several copies of issue #1, including all the variant covers. Today they sell for $30 to $50 each.

Those are two of my bigger successes. Most of the time, the comic book you buy for $2.99 loses a dollar of value the minute you leave the shop. It may never climb above $3.50. Even so, the average comic book is a sounder investment than a share of GM or AIG. And it's a lot more fun to own.

The key to playing the comic-book market is using those average purchases to keep a feel for the marketplace while going heavy when you see an issue that should be an investment. Sometimes you'll do this on a hunch, as I did with *Buffy*. But most of the time, it's not hard to spot value. When Marvel Comics killed Captain America in March 2007, it was an obvious buy. I picked up a couple dozen copies, splitting my position between the two variant covers. One of them now sells for $12, the other for $8.

One of the interesting aspects of the market is that while a variant cover typically costs a couple dollars more than the normal cover, its built-in scarcity helps it hold value. So if you see two copies of, say *Project Superpowers* #3 and one of them is $2.99 but the other is $9.99, the $10 comic is actually a better—and safer—play. It's less likely to lose money and has bigger upside potential. (The variant for *Project Superpowers* #3 now runs about $35, in part because the cover artist, Michael Turner, recently died.)

While new comics have the biggest growth potential, there's a lot of volatility in that market. The real blue chips are old Golden and Silver Age comics. The first five issues of the original 1960 *Justice League of America*, for instance, are worth a few thousand dollars apiece. Older classics, such as *Action Comics* featuring Superman or *Detective Comics* with Batman, are worth much more and tick upward in value each year.

These comics will never experience explosive growth, but because of the characters involved there will always be demand, while the supply constantly shrinks. My long-term plan—I trust my wife has stopped reading by now—is to diversify my portfolio gradually so that as I near retirement, I transition out of small-cap new issues and into the large-cap older books.

The biggest and safest investments are issues that mark the first appearance of long-running characters. As a boy, I dreamed of owning these rare and expensive books, such as *Amazing Fantasy* #15, which has the first appearance of Spider-Man. But I was convinced that spending that sort of money was foolish and irresponsible. As it turns out, *Amazing Fantasy* #15 sold for about $27,000 when I entered the work force 11 years ago. Today it fetches at least $60,000. If only I hadn't squandered my money on retirement accounts and real estate.

There are all sorts of caveats, mind you. Individual sellers typically get only some fraction of the retail or book price when they sell. And comics had their own *annus horribilis* in 1993, when the collectibles market cratered. But even that meltdown was no worse than what we've seen in the real world during the last few months.

I should have been spending more on comic books all along.

Jonathan V. Last

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the weekly Standard

Creative Conservatism

If you're out of power, you might as well take advantage of it. Surely this moment calls for some creative conservatism. The economy has been in recession since December 2007. The financial, housing, and automobile sectors are in disarray. You need to take a healthy dose of anti-anxiety medication before watching the volatile equities markets. Consumer spending is falling to places where it hasn't been in decades. November saw the largest one-month drop in employment since 1974. The Bush administration has been zig-zagging from one policy fix to another with no sign of success.

The GOP is shell-shocked from last month's election results. The gains the party made in the years since the 1994 Republican revolution have been erased. Republicans are without a clear agenda. People say that Republicans don't have any ideas, but that isn't entirely true. They have plenty of ideas—but too many of them are about which part of their coalition is to blame for their current misfortunes.

This sort of squabbling is less than useless. It's inward-looking, woolly-headed, and only furthers the perception that the GOP is out of touch. Unfortunately, when Republicans have tried to be in touch, they've been tempted to be irresponsible. In September, more than a few were ready to risk the global banking system's collapse in the hopes that they could ride anti-Wall Street populism to victory.

These days, plenty of Republicans and conservatives are ready to turn their backs on the big three automakers, and risk a spike in unemployment and who knows what other spillover effects, because the government has to draw the line somewhere. This doesn't mean it's the right policy to support the bailout the automakers want. It probably isn't. But sometimes it seems as if the sum total of the current GOP economic agenda consists of calling for capital gains tax cuts (who has gains?), corporate tax cuts (are there any profits to tax?), and relishing the prospect of bankruptcy for GM, Chrysler, and Ford. How exactly would any of this help the average working—or unemployed—family?

Meanwhile, liberal Democrats, relatively unimpeded, will move on with their agenda.

That agenda is clear. Conservatives may not have any definite answers to what ails the economy and how to fix it, but liberals do: an enormous Keynesian stimulus—somewhere between $500 billion and $1 trillion over two years.

The good news is that conservatives now have a lot of time on their hands. They can think about the future. They can enjoy the luxury of opposition and explore policy alternatives. They can look for something more substantive than fanciful and nostalgic small-government talk, something more principled than going along with Obama. They can pick their battles.

A place to start would be to distinguish between interventions in the economy that might lead us out of this mess and those that will prolong the suffering. The right kind of tax cuts would help. Lower payroll taxes, for instance, would make it cheaper to hire workers and put more money in the pockets of those already working. And there are some regulations—like increasing capital requirements for financial institutions—that might actually shore up confidence in the financial sector.

To purge the complicated and debilitating mortgage securities from the banking system, conservatives might back a federal mortgage refinancing proposal along the lines of what Lawrence B. Lindsey outlined in these pages ("Building a Better Bailout," December 1, 2008). And there are other serious proposals worth considering. At the same time, it will be necessary to energetically oppose those measures that would seriously damage the chances of recovery, such as the rapid unionization that would follow "card-check" legislation, a return to protectionism and high tariffs, and the tax hikes scheduled for 2011.

On the auto bailout, it might help if Republicans abandoned their knee-jerk, anti-Detroit mentality. And not just because of the human costs of a bankrupt American auto industry. An awful lot of Detroit's problems were actually made in Washington. Why not call loudly for the repeal of onerous CAFE regulations (which force Detroit to lose money making small cars no one wants to buy), perhaps in exchange for a gradual increase in the gas tax? The hit to consumers at the pump could be compensated for by the payroll tax cut mentioned above.

A party with bold prescriptions—even competing bold prescriptions—for the future is bound to perform better than one without ideas. And a politician who adopts a program of principled reform—one that responds to the problems of late 2008 and beyond—could just wind up a Republican leader in the process.

The wilderness beckons. Let a thousand conservative flowers bloom.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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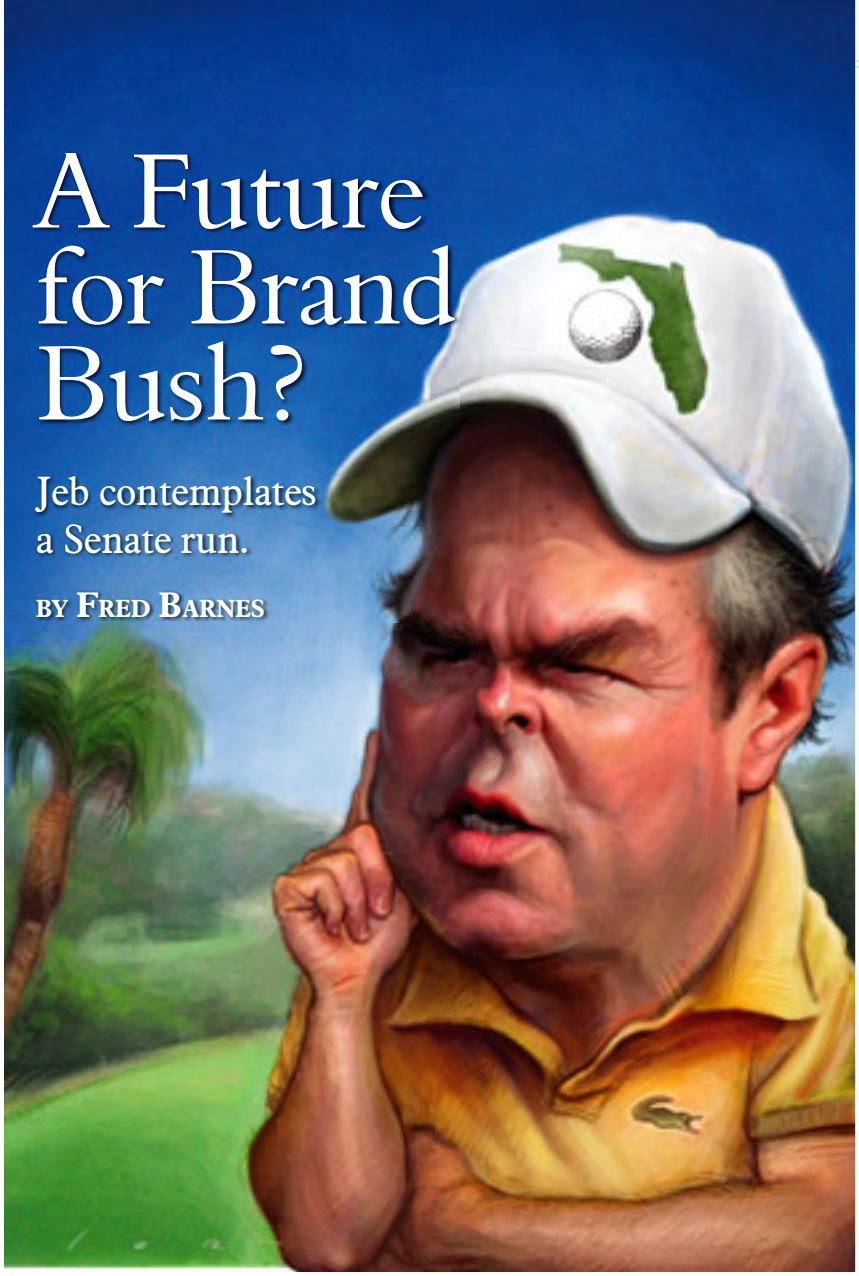
A Future for Brand Bush?

Jeb contemplates a Senate run.

BY FRED BARNES



When Mel Martinez reached Jeb Bush last week to tell him that Martinez would shortly announce his decision not to run for reelection to the Senate, Bush expressed no particular interest in succeeding him in Washington. It was early in the morning, and Bush was working out on an exercise machine. Since Martinez's term won't be over until 2010, Bush had plenty of time—months, not weeks—before he'd have to worry about a campaign. But a day later, he told reporters he's considering running.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Bush was wise to disclose his interest. The quick announcement means that no other Republican can gain support for a 2010 Senate race in Florida. Everyone will be waiting for Bush's decision, and the assumption is he's far more likely than not to run. If he does, he will be a strong favorite to win the seat.

Bush's sudden emergence, after two years out of politics, has national significance beyond the possibility he might run for president some day. Republicans, divided and depressed after crushing election losses in 2006 and this year, need unifying leaders with broad appeal. Bush, in his eight years as Florida governor, was popular with all branches of the party. Merely as a candidate, he'd be a focus of Republican attention.

Of course, that's partly because of the question that never goes away: Will Jeb run for president some day? When I interviewed him two years ago in his waning days as Florida governor, I got the impression he wouldn't. "I'm not a big Washington guy," he told me. And when Republican governors met last month in Miami, Bush's hometown, and he didn't bother to drop by, I took that as another sign of his indifference to running for president, ever.

But a Senate bid would signal he at least wants to keep the presidential option open. Bush can't afford to stay on the sidelines if he has any hope of being president. That's why a Senate race makes sense. As a senator, assuming he's elected, he would be a national figure. He would also have a few years to fill the one gap in his political experience: foreign policy.

It's true that Ronald Reagan hadn't held elective office for six years when he won the Republican presidential nomination in 1980. But he was the leader of a movement. Bush doesn't have that status, though he is far closer to Reagan ideologically than almost any prominent Republican today and certainly more Reagan-like than his brother or father.

For the moment, Bush's last name may be a hindrance, but that problem should begin to fade after President George W. Bush, his brother, leaves office next month. And it may evaporate altogether as the differences between Jeb and George become clear.

Bush is a small government conservative who often talks about having a "libertarian gene." Neither his brother nor his father, the elder President George H.W. Bush, has anything of the kind. "There should not be such a thing as a big government Republican," Jeb Bush told *Politico* after the November election, differentiating himself from his brother in a none-too-subtle way.

He also outlined his view of what Republicans must do to rebuild their party. At the top of the list is not

JASON SEILER

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just advocating limited government but practicing it when in office. He also urged Republicans to champion reform, stamp out corruption, and emphasize an agenda to help families.

Most of that is unremarkable. His wide appeal as Florida governor and a national figure is not. It's rare. Bush is a conventional conservative on economics, social issues, and foreign policy. But he's also a reformer, innovator, and policy wonk, and his record in Florida reflects this. One result: Moderates tend to regard Bush favorably.

Bush, in my view, was the best governor in the country. When he left office in 2006, he was rated an excellent or good governor by 57 percent of Floridians in a Quinnipiac poll. That number would be routine for a governor at the start of his term, but for a departing governor it's unusually high.

Even more impressive was his 56 percent rating among independents, a critical voting bloc that has turned decisively against Republicans in the past two elections. A Republican can't win the White House without reversing that trend.

And there's another important aspect to Bush that involves the future of the Republican party. His wife is originally from Mexico, and he speaks Spanish fluently. When he won reelection in 2002, he won the Cuban-American vote overwhelmingly and, more significantly, captured a majority of the non-Cuban Hispanic vote.

Bush is pro-immigrant. He backed the immigration plan of his brother and John McCain that many Republicans rejected. Opposition to immigration reform has not proven to be a vote-getter, quite the contrary. Its chief impact has been to drive away Hispanic voters.

The Republican party needs Bush to take on a task at which Jeb's brother failed: softening, if not changing, the opposition of Republicans to immigration reform. Otherwise, the surging Hispanic vote may be lost for decades. It dipped to 31 percent for McCain in 2008 and would have dropped further absent McCain's reputation as an immigration reformer.

If Bush runs for the Senate, he'll be in an enviable position. Peter Brown, the Quinnipiac pollster and expert on Florida politics, says Bush would not only clear the Republican field in 2010, he'd clear much of the Democratic field. "It would be very dangerous for any Democrat who holds a significant office—a congressional seat or statewide office—to challenge Bush," Brown says.

Democrats had put Martinez at the top of their Senate target list for 2010. Bush would be a tougher target, though Democrats might fund an opponent lavishly in hopes of defeating a Bush. They tried this in 2002. Democratic national chairman Terry McAuliffe "guaranteed" Governor Bush would be defeated for reelection. If Jeb Bush runs for the Senate in 2010, chances are you won't hear that kind of bravado again. ♦

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Mandate for What?

Obama has good reason to make the left gnash their teeth. BY NOEMIE EMERY

On Monday, December 1, Barack Obama, who had kicked off his campaign a year earlier touting his opposition to the war in Iraq, introduced his national security team to the public. As secretary of state there was Hillary Clinton, his opponent in the primaries who had voted for the war in Iraq; as national security adviser James Jones, a friend and supporter of John McCain's who had also backed the war in Iraq; and as secretary of defense Robert Gates, a carry-over appointed by George W. Bush, whose administration Obama and all of his party (except for Joe Lieberman) had spent the past four years running against.

On Tuesday, December 2, Saxby Chambliss, who had beaten Democrat Jim Martin by 3 points on Election Day but failed to reach the 50 percent-plus-one-vote level required by Georgia law, won his run-off election by 15 points, an impressive gain in just four weeks. These two incidents are connected, and each helps to explain why the other one happened: Chambliss's spread and the Obama selections both are the signs of a swing back to "normal" (or to "normal while in a recession") after a brief intense move around the election caused by the first wave of the crash and the bailout that swung the public mood to the left. Two public swings in the month of September help to explain just what happened—and why the mandate for Obama may not be as big as it seemed.

Hard as it is now to remember, in the first weeks of September, McCain had been forging ahead. He led in most of the national polls, led in the swing states, was winning independents, women, and Hillary voters, and extending his range into enemy country, turning some blue states pale pink. In a deep hole since the 2006 midterms, the generic numbers for the Republican party had even begun to edge up. A Gallup poll released on September 11 showed the Republicans with a 4-point lead in the generic ballot. And then came September 15.

Let us revisit those thrilling two weeks in September, when the financial world as we know it seemed to vanish completely, and the Republican party shot out both its feet. September 15 was the day Lehman Brothers failed, leading to a cascading financial implosion and the announcement three days later by Treasury secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke that unless the government bought up $700 billion of failed financial instruments, credit would freeze up throughout the nation, and indeed the world. With experts forecasting disaster, McCain left the trail and went back to Washington to help move the bailout through Congress, where most of his party was firmly opposed. After five days of haggling, the bill reached the floor of the House on September 29, where it failed by 12 votes. Republicans were blamed for the failure, and for the subsequent collapse of the market. (They did not help themselves by going on television to complain that Nancy Pelosi had injured their feelings with a red-meat, partisan speech.) A revised bill was passed four days later, but it looked too late and too little. McCain now looked weak, and his party feckless. And the election was one month away.

The results of this two week misadventure-plus-meltdown quickly showed up in the polls. On September 29, Gallup noted that Obama had moved to a 48 percent lead and a 5-point advantage. Scott Rasmussen, the most accurate pollster of the 2008 season, has said the race was decided in the two weeks in September when the financial markets melted down. The crash, combined with the fight over the bailout, eroded what was left of voters' crumbling faith in Republican governance. McCain lost 9 points in those days, going from a 3-point lead in some polls to the 6- to 7-point deficit that he would lose by. The election was lost in effect by September 29, and nothing that was said or done after that changed its course.

McCain's lead, of course, was unstable and shallow, or it would never have vanished so quickly, and the fact that he trailed through most of the year showed that his center-right and pro-war agenda had not won over the country at large. But the complementary fact that he stayed for so long within the margin of error showed that it had not been wholly rejected, and the fact that Obama's lead briefly vanished showed similar cracks on his side. What this suggests is that there were a large number of voters in the middle who were only lightly attached to each party and candidate. Michael Barone cites a series of Associated Press/Yahoo polls that tracked 2,000 voters between November 2007 and 2008, and showed that "17 percent of those who ultimately voted for Obama said they were for McCain in at least one of the ten tracking polls, while 11 percent of eventual McCain voters said they backed Obama," at one point in the year.

Many of these no doubt were the people who switched to McCain when the conventions were over, and then, after the financial crash and Republicans' stunning display of incompetence, turned back to Obama again. In other words, a sizable chunk of the people who gave a victory to Obama and his left-of-center agenda on November 4 were willing only weeks earlier to give a hearing to the center-right, more pro-war agenda of the McCain-Palin ticket, and then were

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pushed back into the Democrats' column by a sequence of extreme events. Without these events, the Democrats still might have won, but it would have been closer and the congressional results might have looked very different. Norm Coleman would probably not now be in a recount in Minnesota, and Saxby Chambliss would no doubt never have been in a run-off at all.

Obama's win was an impressive one and marked a genuine willingness to try more liberal government. But it is also likely that his win on Election Day was enhanced and inflated, less by the appeal of his agenda and party than by conditions not of his making, and by circumstances beyond his control.

Barack Obama did not get where he is now by being an idiot, and he knows much better than many of his backers how he was elected. He knows how slim was the margin by which he won over Hillary Clinton, who ran at the end as a liberal hawk; and he knows that the people who were willing in the first weeks of September to vote for McCain did not vote for either a far-left economic agenda or for a lost war in Iraq.

He knows, too, that the country's governing center lies in the space between himself and his two former rivals, and not, as some think, off to one side. This is why Saxby Chambliss improved on his lead, why Obama refused to be drawn into the run-off in Georgia, and why, after campaigning against the whole Clinton-Bush era, he is bringing back some of its people and policies, adopting the Clinton economic team and some of the Bush guidelines for the war on terror, and giving the prize spots in his national security roster to George Bush's defense secretary, John McCain's ally, and Bill Clinton's wife. Peculiar conditions padded his lead, but he has to govern the country as it exists now and in the future, and not as it was in that brief span between September 15 and the fourth of November that is now in the rear-view mirror and quickly fading into the past. ♦

Dr. Daschle's Dubious Cure

Get ready for health care activism.

BY HENRY I. MILLER & DAVE GERSHON

GARY LOOKE

By choosing a seasoned Washington operator like former Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle as secretary of health and human services, President-elect Barack Obama has made his health care priorities clear. He will promote an aggressive legislative agenda with far-reaching effects not only on health care services and insurance, but also on the makers of drugs and medical devices, pharmacy benefits managers (third party administrators of prescription drug programs), and clinical research organizations, which conduct clinical testing of new drug candidates, under contract from drug companies.

The three major themes of health

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care reform under the new administration will likely be (1) mandatory national health care coverage, (2) additional power and responsibilities for the FDA, ostensibly to ensure greater drug safety, and (3) reduction of health care costs. There will thus be a push for incentives to encourage the use of generic drugs (at the expense of branded drugs) through a multi-tiered formulary model, patent reform, and new mandates for the FDA.

Let us leave the discussion of resource allocation and compulsory insurance for another day and focus here on the fate of the FDA, which is certainly in need of renewal, but not of the sort contemplated by Daschle's old colleagues on Capitol Hill and by Obama's advisers. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is suffering from two decades of cultural, organizational, and management problems that have depressed drug approvals to historic lows while pushing drug development costs to stratospheric levels.

In fact, at a time when drug development should have been spurred by innovative new technologies and a decade of steady increases in R&D expenditures—which tripled to more than $45 billion between 1995 and 2007, drug approvals have steadily declined. The 19 new medicines approved in 2007 were a 24-year low. Bringing a new drug to market now requires on average 12-15 years, and costs more than $1.2 billion—in no small part because the average length of a clinical trial increased 70 percent between 1999 and 2006. Perhaps the most ominous statistic is that drug manufacturers eventually recoup their R&D costs for only one in five approved drugs.

Worst of all for the developers of small-molecule drugs and biopharmaceuticals is the prospect of top-down price controls. Although for the most part this approach has been avoided in the United States, some researchers have argued that even here the impact of price control efforts for drugs has been significant. For example, a group at the Center for Healthcare and Insurance Studies at the University of Connecticut reported that prices fall as the government's share of spending on drugs increases, and that this exerts a negative effect on innovation and, ultimately, on public health. They studied U.S. data from 1960 to 2001 and found that "from 1992 to 2001 a 10 percent increase in the growth of government's share of total spending on pharmaceuticals was associated with a 6.7 percent annual reduction in the growth of pharmaceutical prices." When the government increases its share of spending, they argued, pharmaceutical companies considering an investment in the development of new drugs can look forward to lower revenues, and this reduces their incentive to innovate.

A study conducted by the University of Connecticut found that prices fall as the government's share of spending on drugs increases, and that this exerts a negative effect on innovation and, ultimately, on public health. Notwithstanding such findings, the Democratic congressional leadership is likely to require government officials to negotiate drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies—de facto price controls.

Notwithstanding such findings, it is likely that the Democratic congressional leadership will change the Medicare drug benefit to require government officials to negotiate drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies, which would represent de facto price controls. Under the current program, competing insurance companies individually negotiate the deals and offer coverage to the retired and disabled. Inevitably, the government will muscle drug prices to submarket levels, which will inhibit drug companies' ability and willingness to develop new drugs. The precedent of the Veterans Administration health care system suggests that another likely outcome of such compulsory negotiations will be to eliminate completely the coverage of certain drugs under Medicare. Only 19 percent of drugs approved by the FDA since 2000 are listed on the VA formulary, and less than 40 percent of drugs approved in the 1990s are listed.

As the long-time leader of Senate Democrats, Daschle may be well suited to shepherding legislation through Congress and directing its implementation by his department, but he lacks the scientific and medical background to oversee the scientific issues that will arise in the research-intensive components of his vast HHS empire. The department encompasses critical public health agencies, including the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the FDA, and dispenses about $30 billion in grants annually, more than the rest of the U.S. government combined. Tommy Thompson, who served as HHS secretary during much of the past eight years and who was also an old political pro from his days as Wisconsin's governor, presided over a series of public health policy debacles because he was not conversant with medical science and economics. A contributing factor was the Clinton administration's decision to remove the assistant secretary of health—traditionally a public health policy-oriented physician—from line authority over HHS's public health agencies. The assistant secretary is now little more than an observer.

Daschle, then, will need strong advisers and agency heads who will bring genuine expertise to complex issues. He would do well to include a few who understand the power of free markets and competition. ♦

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Wilkinson and Posner, Dissenting

Two conservative judges challenge Justice Scalia.

BY ADAM J. WHITE

Even before their Election Day drubbing, conservatives had begun to reexamine their positions on a variety of issues. Conspicuously absent from the intramural debate, however, has been "originalism"—the theory that judges should decide constitutional cases in accordance with their best estimate of the original public meaning of the constitutional provision at issue. While positions on health care reform or foreign policy may be subject to revision, originalism faces little challenge among conservatives.

Recent articles by two Republican-appointed judges, however, identify a fault line along which intra-conservative debate could arise. Each focuses on the Supreme Court's recent decision in *District of Columbia* v. *Heller*, where the Court struck down the District of Columbia's draconian regulation of handguns by a vote of 5-4.

At the crux of *Heller* was the Second Amendment's curious construction: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Undertaking an originalist review of the Second Amendment's text and history, Justice Antonin Scalia's opinion for the Court concluded that the "well regulated Militia clause" was merely a "prefatory clause," which could not limit the amendment's subsequent "operative clause," and that the D.C. handgun ban violated the right protected by the Second Amendment. In dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens conducted his own review of the Second Amendment's text and history and reached diametrically opposite conclusions.

Most conservatives celebrated *Heller*, but Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson manifestly did not. Appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit by President Reagan, he long has been regarded as one of the most respected conservatives on the federal bench; he was short-listed for a Supreme Court appointment in 2005. His critical essay, forthcoming in the *Virginia Law Review*, bestows upon Scalia's opinion the most scathing condemnation known to conservatives: comparison to *Roe* v. *Wade*.

Rejecting Scalia's originalist analysis, Wilkinson asserts that "the constitutional text did not clearly mandate the result, and the Court had discretion to decide the case either way"; he calls Scalia's analysis "an exposé of original intent as a theory no less subject to judicial subjectivity and endless argumentation [than] any other."

Wilkinson argues that the *Heller* and *Roe* decisions share four fundamental flaws: Each (1) manufactured controversial rights not clearly established by the text of the Constitution, (2) threw the courts into a "political thicket" where they will "decide contentious questions without clear constitutional guidance," (3) failed to allow legislatures to make the difficult factual or value-laden judgment calls for which they are uniquely well suited, and (4) disregarded the value of reserving such contentious issues to state and local authorities rather than deciding them at the national level.

Wilkinson's specific criticisms are open to challenge. In arguing that *Heller* settles the constitutional question at the national level, for example, Wilkinson assumes, with little justification, that the Court will apply *Heller* against state laws, and not merely against federal laws.

But Wilkinson's specific criticisms are overshadowed by a broader criticism of originalism per se: that Scalia's exclusive reliance on originalism disregards a host of other longstanding conservative values, such as "textualism, self-restraint, separation of powers and federalism as well." *Heller*, he argues, "has left only originalism as the foundation of conservative jurisprudence. A set of reasonable tenets each providing a separate check on judicial activism has now been replaced by a singular focus on original understanding."

The second major conservative criticism of *Heller* is found in Judge Richard Posner's "In Defense of Looseness," published in the *New Republic*. Posner, appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit by President Reagan, is a longstanding critic of originalism, preferring instead a version of legal "pragmatism" rooted in the jurisprudence of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Like Wilkinson, Posner offers a narrow criticism and a broad one. Narrowly, Posner criticizes Scalia's originalist analysis in *Heller*, arguing that a truly "originalist" analysis—unlike what Posner sees as Scalia's "pretense of engaging in originalism interpretation" to achieve political ends—would have led the Court to affirm the D.C. handgun ban, not invalidate it.

More broadly, Posner argues that "originalism" is inconsistent with the judicial methodologies espoused by the legendary William Blackstone and Chief Justice John Marshall. Blackstone and Marshall are foundational figures in American law: Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* was the single most important legal treatise at the time

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of the Constitution's ratification, and Marshall largely created the Supreme Court as we know it today.

Like Wilkinson's essay, Posner's specific criticism of Scalia's *Heller* opinion is open to challenge; legal scholars Matthew Franck, Ed Whelan, and Jim Lindgren have subjected Posner's essay to intense scrutiny.

But Posner's broader argument, as corrected and supplemented by Franck's analysis, is an important one: Blackstone's *Commentaries* expressly embraced the notion that judges should decide cases according to not only "the words, the context, [and] the subject-matter" of the constitutional or statutory provision at issue, but also "the effects and consequence, or the spirit and reason of the law."

Wilkinson's and Posner's essays already have attracted much attention, including an analysis in the *New York Times*. But by focusing almost exclusively on Wilkinson's and Posner's criticism of *Heller*'s specifics, the debate has paid not nearly enough attention to their more important challenge to originalism per se.

As Wilkinson recognizes, *Heller* marks the culmination of originalism's remarkable three-decade march from obscurity to dominance among legal conservatives. Prior to originalism's ascendancy in the 1970s and 1980s, conservatives espoused a variety of competing (and often contradictory) values: natural rights, deference to legislative judgments, notions of federalism, and other prudential or pragmatic themes. For example, James Bradley Thayer, a well-respected Harvard professor, wrote in 1893 that courts should not strike down a statute as unconstitutional unless the statute unquestionably violates the Constitution. (Wilkinson echoes Thayer, writing, "When a constitutional question is so close, when conventional interpretive methods do not begin to decisively resolve the issue, the tie . . . should go to the side of deference to democratic processes.") Justice John Marshall Harlan II strongly defended federalism against the Warren Court's nationalist onslaught. And Learned Hand and Henry Friendly, two legendary twentieth-century federal judges, each constructed a body of pragmatic and prudential analysis that deferred to popular majorities in many cases but defended counter-majoritarian rights in others.

Justice Antonin Scalia

THOMAS FLUHARTY

The specific precepts of each of the "conservative" theories of judicial decision-making changed over time, just as conservatives' positions on most issues have changed over time, but each has sought to answer a straightforward question: What to do when the controlling legal text's meaning is unclear? Of course, virtually all conservatives agree that when the words of the law are clear, then their meaning should be given effect. But when—if ever—should judges conclude that a legal provision is unclear, such that nontextual considerations should come into play?

Most originalists would vigorously dispute the suggestion that constitutional or statutory provisions are so ambiguous that their original meanings cannot be given effect. (Judge Robert Bork once created controversy by suggesting that the Ninth Amendment, which alludes to unenumerated rights "retained by the people," was an unenforceable "ink blot"; few have embraced his argument.) But in the past, conservatives have been more receptive to the notion that legal texts often incorporate ambiguity, either by accident or by design, and that nontextual considerations must guide the judge's application of those laws in particular cases.

With Scalia and Justice Clarence Thomas, originalism has benefited from the service of two sharp-minded and eloquent spokesmen on the national stage. With the recent additions of Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito, however, the Court now includes two conservatives who do not appear to be "pure" originalists and who may provide, over the course of their tenures, a visible alternative to Scalia's and Thomas's versions of originalism.

Roberts, for example, may resemble Scalia or Thomas less than he does the aforementioned Judge Friendly, whom *Newsweek* described as Roberts's "role model," for whom he speaks of "deep reverence" and with "a certain twinkle in his eye." Similarly, as Terry Eastland reported in 2005, a young Alito drew his inspiration from Yale's Alexander Bickel—a proponent of judicial restraint and a self-described "Whig," but by no means an originalist.

Although Roberts and Alito joined Scalia's opinion in *Heller*, there may come a day when one or both of them part ways with Scalia and Thomas in a high-profile case over a question of constitutional or statutory ambiguity, basing their opinions on nontextual considerations disfavored by originalists. Such a disagreement may well be the only event capable of reigniting vigorous debate among conservatives on the question of judicial philosophy, Wilkinson's and Posner's critiques notwithstanding. ♦

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Palin Went Down to Georgia

Why her popularity is undimmed.

BY MARJORIE DANNENFELSER

It looks like Sarah Palin won't be fading away. Not if Saxby Chambliss has anything to say about it. "I can't overstate the impact she had down here," said Chambliss shortly after his surprisingly solid 15-point victory in the December 2 Georgia Senate runoff. Chambliss, who went from a 49.8-46.8 percent lead on November 4 to a 57-43 victory over Democrat Jim Martin in the runoff (Georgia law requires an absolute majority), credited Palin with helping his campaign "peak" with four hugely attended election-eve rallies.

"All these folks did a great job coming in," he said, referring to an all-star cast of Republicans who made appearances on his behalf. "But when she walks in a room, folks just explode."

Despite the best efforts of the media, left-of-center feminists, and a brigade of political elites, including more than a few Beltway Republicans, to write obituaries for Palin's national political career, she continues to be the second biggest phenomenon of the 2008 election cycle, behind only the president-elect.

"I am not going to Washington to seek their good opinion," she said in her convention acceptance speech, referring to the media. And gain it, she did not. But their disdain—like that of the abovementioned elites—seems only to fan the firestorm of support for her. Witness the independent "Team Sarah" website, started September 15 by the Susan B. Anthony List, the pro-life group I head. Every time Palin is hammered by the media, this stable of online supporters grows. Our Facebook-style political networking site has grown from 50 members to 60,000 in less than two months, the biggest surges coming when Palin-bashing crests.

These are highly motivated grassroots activists, some involved in politics for the first time, some seasoned types, all awaiting the next Palin project. Some of the most eloquent are women ecstatic over the new brand of feminism Palin represents: populist and pro-life. There is no other woman on the national political stage like her—and hasn't been in recent times. To whom could she be compared—Geraldine Ferraro, Hillary Clinton, Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein? She doesn't begin to fit this cookie-cutter model of pro-choice, pro-gender-quota woman in politics that left-feminism has served up.

But Palin has forebears in American politics. She looks a lot more like the early suffragists than anyone on the national stage now, especially in her pro-life stance. Susan B. Anthony, for whom my organization is named, for instance, called abortion "child murder." Elizabeth Cady Stanton called it a sickening symptom of women's mistreatment: "When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women to treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit."

Under media attack and scrutiny, Palin and her family became a kind of microcosm of America's "crisis" abortion debates. Her Down Syndrome baby Trig and her pregnant teenage daughter are witnesses to the life-affirming attitudes the early feminists held.

And Palin operates in a grievance-free environment. She *likes* being a woman. It is apparent, attractive, and typical of what most American women feel, or would like to. She gives every appearance of loving her role as a wife and mother of a bunch of kids. She lives as if she believes in the natural complementarity of men and women, rather than the supposed enmity and competition of the sexes depicted as universal by left feminism.

She is feminine and she is confident. This confidence is what gets under the skin of the old-guard feminists the most. How could she? She takes her femininity and pro-life position and strides confidently right through those doors they feel they opened. And it drives them to distraction that millions of American women either love it or are intrigued by it. Finally, after all these years, we see a confident, successful, feminine woman no more afraid of barriers than the hardest-core liberal feminist.

Put another way, her attractiveness is her authenticity. Perhaps that's the upside of the "hokey" epithet pundits throw at her. She does not try to be somebody she is not, and she has resisted the professional image packagers that threaten to unravel her appeal.

The crowds that flock to see Palin wherever she goes have found something different in her: authenticity, charisma, and hope. Too bad these qualities are "different" in American politics, but the palpable craving for them explains much of people's continuing interest in her.

Palin's contribution to the Chambliss campaign's impressive closing kick is evidence of two things. Grassroots America does not want her to go away, and she has no intention of doing so. ♦

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The Past Isn't What It Used To Be

The remaking of the mixed-up National Museum of American History

By Andrew Ferguson

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, which squats like an immense, unopened crate of machine parts on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., closed its doors for a two-year renovation in September 2006, and here's the interesting thing: Hardly anybody seemed to notice, or care. A press release, a squib in the local paper, and then . . . silence. In the first weeks after the shuttering, you might catch sight of a forlorn tourist tugging at the locked door and turning away in disappointment, but the disappointment just proved that the tourist had never been inside. Only those who have actually entered the Smithsonian's American history museum, eager to dive into the drama and wonder of the country's past, know how disappointing a museum can be.

The NMAH has been disappointing tourists for 44 years, since its opening in 1964 as the premier showcase for the public presentation of American history. By a long stretch it has been the least popular of the mall's Big Three museums. Most years it's drawn roughly half as many visitors as the Museum of Natural History next door and a third fewer than the Air and Space Museum across the mall, despite the thousands of schoolkids bused in from the surrounding suburbs as a painless way for their teachers to juice up their social studies classes. There have been years when even the snoozey National Gallery of Art, filled with still-lifes and hunks of marble, rivaled the NMAH as a tourist draw.

We might credit this to the often lamented indifference to history on the part of Americans—a forward-looking people too consumed with getting ahead to dawdle over the past—but just as likely the museum's nearly half-century of failure is the fault of the museum itself: of the unsightly building that houses it and of the exhibits it has mounted and, perhaps most of all, of the tedious and voguish view of history its curators have imposed upon visitors.

Natural light now shines in (opposite page) on objects sublime and ridiculous alike. Above, Dorothy's ruby slippers from 'The Wizard of Oz.'

The museum officially reopened last month, and there were hints that its long record of failure was about to be reversed. Attendance for the Thanksgiving weekend was nearly three times what it was before the renovation. In ceremonies to mark the occasion, the president delivered a speech, followed by the first lady. Colonial pipers piped and historical reenactors reenacted, and the unavoidable Colin Powell—fast becoming our nation's toastmaster general, as George E. Jessel was to an earlier generation—read the Gettysburg Address. The words "revitalization" and even "rebirth" were tossed around by several of the speakers. Museum flacks emphasized that the reopening marked the completion of only the first phase of a planned three-phase overhaul. What's to come was suggested by Brent Glass, the museum's director for the last six years, who said in an interview as the renovation began, "We're looking at an intellectual change as well as an architectural change." And the changes were long overdue, as everyone seemed to agree. "A far better museum has been made here," said the historian David McCullough.

For now the architectural transformation is the most noticeable change. Anyone who had spent dim hours in the old building can only marvel. The original architects

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had designed 300,000 square feet of public space to suit the needs more of curators than the public, whose convenience and interests were ignored with iron discipline. The interior admitted little outside light, making it easier to protect old documents and other artifacts but leaving visitors to fumble through the shadows. Escalators and elevators were tucked away in remote corners, and glyphic signage offered no help in getting from one floor to another—and unintentionally raised the question of why you'd want to bother. Ceilings suspended low over long hallways confirmed the subterranean gloom. Even the boosters in the Society of Architectural Historians, in their Washington guidebook, had harsh words: "The lack of clear architectural order and hierarchy have resulted in incoherent interiors, where visitors are disoriented and regularly have to be directed to exits, as the architecture does not provide the necessary clues." It was an unfriendly place.

Now a new central hall is flooded with natural light, pouring down from a skylight five stories above. A grand staircase, made of glass, glitters like a Busby Berkeley stage set. Light is still uneven in the exhibition wings, but blacked-out windows have been stripped wherever possible and the rooms brightened by unobtrusive ceiling fixtures. At the mall entrance a new gallery houses a refurbished Star-Spangled Banner, the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write his poem and that the Smithsonian has made a curatorial fetish for many years. With the aid of the usual soundtracks and video tricks, visitors can not only see the flag but, in three or four minutes, learn a fair amount about the Battle of Baltimore, the War of 1812, and 19th-century flag making. And when they see the flag before them, slanted behind protective glass and lit with the blue light of dawn, they might get a patriotic chill, too—and a hint of the intellectual change that Brent Glass referred to.

Subterranean gloom: the interior of the National Museum of American History before the renovation

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The Star-Spangled gallery is best understood in contrast to what came before it. For more than 20 years an exhibit called "A Material World" was meant to serve as an introduction to the museum. And it did, more successfully than the curators knew: In a single exhibit it expressed the museum's understanding of its purpose and its relationship to the public. It also helped explain why, among all the Smithsonian museums, the NMAH had one of the lowest rates of return visitors.

The NMAH was conceived in the 1950s. The historians and public officials who backed it "keenly felt the need for a museum that would illustrate the 'American way of life' and celebrate the nation's cultural, scientific, and technological achievement," in the words of a contemporary Smithsonian historian. They saw history as a narrative in which extraordinary people did unusually consequential things. But by the time the museum opened, a decade later, it was a museum of social history, "history from the bottom up." The new historians were more interested in broad concepts than in dis-

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crete events, in the vast movements of peoples rather than the doings of statesmen, reformers, explorers, diplomats, and generals. They found more relevance in econometric models and statistical tables than in treaties or constitutions. They also, as you'll notice from the quotation above, began putting ironic quote marks around phrases like the "American way of life."

Social history dug up mother lodes of valuable material, and enriched the historical understanding of anyone who bothered to pay attention. Yet instead of supplementing traditional narrative history with fresh information, social history supplanted it altogether, driving traditional historians from their usual professional perches in the universities and museums.

For the public, the consequences were profound. Quite apart from its merits as a historical method, social history had an undeniable defect: It was deeply boring. This was made especially clear when it was pressed into service as a working philosophy for museum curators, who found license to discount artifacts and displays tied to individual historical personages in favor of homely artifacts of everyday life, arranged under broad abstractions like "Time" or "Difference" or "Community." Chronology in particular was dismissed as a contrivance—a "coercive category," as one new historian famously explained, "that by its normative inclusive character denies its own fictionality and instability and thereby distorts the creative possibilities of the present and future."

"A Material World," along with other exhibits, was the practical result of the shift in historical understanding. It sprawled like a postmodern art installation over several thousand square feet of the museum's first floor. Neither the exhibit's beginning nor its end was clearly defined, so in theory visitors could wander around until they dropped dead from boredom. Artifacts loosely defined—most of them were commercial products—had been scattered on the floor and on tables, plucked without evident method from the machine shop, the business office, the factory floor, the library, the tailor's workroom, the beauty salon, the bank: guitars, combs, lampshades, shoes, toys, razors, tires—items made from, as brief plaques explained, different kinds of material (hence the name!). Here was Bakelite, there was cotton, pig iron was over there, and plastic—lots and lots of plastic—was everywhere.

Museum displays are meant to be improving for the museumgoer; they're educational or uplifting, horrifying or ennobling. Traditional historical displays might inspire a love of country or deepen an appreciation for the sacrifice of forebears. The new curators had an idea of uplift all their own. The literature announced that the purpose of "A Material World" was "to provide tools for a new way of seeing"—a goal far more ambitious than even a traditionalist might come up with. Yet the tourists who wandered in off the mall with their squirming kids in hopes of seeing George Washington's battle sword or General Sherman's horse (it's stuffed and kept in a glass case up on the third floor) were likely to be puzzled. The main plaque had an explanation for them: "This exhibit does not attempt to answer all possible questions about culture, aesthetics, technology, or use. It aims to suggest some answers and stimulate vision to look at objects throughout the Museum in a new way. Stop and consider the materials." And then, if you're good, we'll let you see the horse.

Among all the Smithsonian museums, the National Museum of American History had one of the lowest rates of return visitors.

"A Material World" was an exhibit only a curator could love.

In an age of hyperspecialization, profs and curators face the same professional hazard: As they burrow into the remotest crannies of whatever sub-sub-subdiscipline has entranced them, they forget what their jobs are for. A fargone English professor will try to turn freshmen into deconstructionist literary theorists when all they really want is for someone to explain what *The Golden Bowl* is supposed to be about; in the same way a museum curator will forget why people come to look at museums in the first place. At the Smithsonian the curators appeared lost in a dorm room bull session or the defense of a second-rate dissertation. A wall plaque from a recent exhibit gives the flavor: "In daily life, national identity often merges, overlaps, and interacts with many other kinds of identities, [which] can help illuminate the forces that have shaped American history." The plaque was alongside a display of a cheesehead hat from the 1996 Clinton-Gore campaign.

The theorizing of social history offered curators an excuse to display anything. The castoffs of popular culture proved irresistible—and not just celebrity-touched "icons" like Archie Bunker's chair, still bearing the imprint of Carroll O'Connor's hallowed buttocks, or the zippered sweater from Mister Rogers's creepy neighborhood. One of thousands of Barbie dolls manufactured in 1960 could qualify; ditto a Swanson's TV dinner tray from 1967, a pair of Keds sneakers, a Topps baseball card, a nurse's cap. These along with that Clinton-Gore cheesehead were part of a display

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called "Treasures": "One hundred fifty of our most prized and important artifacts." Sometimes the criteria seemed more journalistic than historical. When cops busted a sweatshop in El Monte California in 1995, Smithsonian curators swooped in, dismantled the room, and trucked it back to the museum in Washington, where it was reassembled and labeled "iconic." In the 1980s, AIDS activists could scarcely keep their famous quilt together for fear of NMAH curators' grabbing another scrap to show museumgoers.

Traditional displays also fell victim to the earnestness. Of the museum's three million artifacts, some are so revered that even the curators couldn't justify placing them in mothballs to make room for a Hulk comic book or Phyllis Diller's cigarette holder. General Washington's uniform and camp tent, for example, remained on view, but now a visitor was told they "reflect the various ways Americans have imagined and remembered Washington as both man and myth." The microphone FDR used in his fireside chats was set out not as a relic in its own right but "as part of the Smithsonian's efforts to document political uses of the mass media." No chance was missed to turn something charming and evocative into something dull enough to be interesting to a social historian. The Smithsonian had displayed the first ladies' inaugural gowns since 1914. In the NMAH the exhibit became a study of how "First Ladies embody the contradictions and conflicts that accompanied the changing role of women in American society. In a unique way their stories reflect debates over what it has meant to be an American woman."

The United States, as presented, was a difficult place to love. The only exhibit on World War II featured the internment of Japanese Americans.

Inevitably, the Smithsonian's obsession with social history descended into political correctness—a dismal accounting of American history as an endless manipulation of powerless groups by a powerful elite, punctuated now and then by the triumphant, but always incomplete, liberation of the oppressed. The political critique was implicit from early on. As a former director of the museum told the *Washington Post*: "We set about to reacquaint Americans with the ambiguity of public life and the ambiguity of American institutions," an effort that drew criticism, he said, from constituencies that were always "reaching for an artificial, false simplicity." The goal, said another curator, was to "challenge visitors' preconceived notions and views on American history and the world around them."

A couple of problems were apparent from the start. For one thing, fewer and fewer Americans had preconceived notions about American history because they hadn't been taught any. And it wasn't a coincidence that all this "reacquainting" ran in only one direction, politically. Thus the family with the squalling kids might have stepped in from the mall with a relatively benign view of their country, based on personal experience, but the museum wised them up pretty quick, as they found themselves relentlessly *challenged* with *ambiguity*.

In truth, though, the museum's picture of America wasn't ambiguous at all. It was clear as could be, from the smallest detail to the largest strokes. The United States, as presented in its preeminent museum of history, was a difficult place to love. The biggest exhibit on World War II—the only exhibit on World War II—was devoted to the internment of Japanese Americans. World War I was reduced to a single small display about the role of women. Mention of the achievements of American farmers was restricted to the abuse of sharecroppers. When an exhibit touched on the country's economic system (infrequently), it was to demonstrate capital's exploitation of labor: sweat shops, the busted-up strikes of Mexican farm workers, tributes to César Chávez and Harry Bridges, abandoned textile workers, and the Chinese immigrants who built the railroads and felt the lash for their trouble. Wherever you turned, some artifact was threatening to raise your consciousness.

And the picture was made even starker by what was left out. From Hamilton to Eisenhower, most of the great names of American history had been purged. Little attention was paid to military sacrifice and heroism, diplomacy, national politics, religion, the Constitution, or the bounty of capitalism and its remarkable spread across every race and class.

Over the years, there were occasional public complaints about the dullness and the pitilessly ideological content, some lampoons of absurd exhibits like "A Material World," but mostly the curators benefited from that deference to experts that is another hallmark of the American experience. Finally, though, beginning about a decade ago, people started to notice what was happening at the National Museum of American History—people who could do something about it.

Though our grandchildren will never believe it, the Republican control of Congress offered fleeting moments that brimmed with hope and promise. One such moment came on July 28, 1999, during a hearing of the Senate Committee on Rules and

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Administration, Sen. Mitch McConnell presiding.

It wasn't much noticed at the time—nothing beyond a glancing story in the *Washington Post* a few days later. The rules committee oversees the Smithsonian Institution, and the only witness this day was Michael Heyman, the Smithsonian's then secretary. Presumably Heyman arrived prepared for the usual dishwater back-and-forth about budgets and construction timetables. McConnell had other ideas. He had recently visited the NMAH. He'd heard some unkind things about the museum, he said, rumors about persistent bias in the exhibits, unpatriotic slants on the country's history. He wanted to see for himself.

"I saw quite a lot," McConnell told Heyman, "and much of what I saw, I didn't like." In exhibit after exhibit, McConnell said, he had sensed "a drift toward political correctness"—the consistent implication that American history was at bottom a story of exploitation and repression. An exhibit on 19th-century immigrants, he pointed out, had dwelt exclusively on "the dark side of capitalism," suggesting that the social and economic improvement of the nation's immigrant populations had been owing "to luck, just luck," rather than hard work, ingenuity, and a uniquely free political and economic system. An exhibit on Indians of the Southwest had an equally anti-American, anti-Western bias.

"For example," McConnell said, "in the New Mexico Pueblo exhibit, references are made to 'invasive forms of Christianity.'" He didn't like the sly pejorative. "Invasive!" he said. "The characterization seems more apt for a parasitic virus, a plague, than as a means of describing the evolution of Christianity in this country."

It was highly unusual for the federal government's cultural bureaucrats to be second-guessed by people in positions of budgetary authority. Heyman responded as a man who's been blindsided by a 16-wheeler.

"I didn't think it was very careful criticism . . . to characterize the whole on the basis of snippets," Heyman told the *Post* when he retired six months later. "And the snippets weren't accurate."

Actually, the snippets were accurate—McConnell could have found much worse if he'd looked more closely. Nothing dramatic or immediate came from this flash of Republican mau-mauing. But word spread throughout the institution's ranks that an ideological cleansing, led by Republicans, was imminent unless some gesture was made.

Just about the time that McConnell strode through the museum, spy glass in hand, Kenneth Behring was wandering there too. Behring is very rich. He'd just donated $20 million to the natural history museum next door, but he'd never been to the museum of American history. And what he saw he didn't like.

"It was just so dark," he said in a brief interview last month. "So negative. I thought, this isn't the country I know. There's nothing here about what made this the greatest country in the history of the world. Where are the great people who made it possible? It just showed the things we did wrong, not all the things we've done right. I worried: What are kids going to think when they come here?

"So I thought"—and here he smiled the smile that only rich people get to smile—"I can help fix this."

Behring is one of the country's great philanthropists.

NEWSCOM

President Bush talks to donor Kenneth Behring, right, and Smithsonian Institution Secretary G. Wayne Clough at the reopening of the National Museum of American History in November.

He was born in Freeport, Illinois, in 1928. His father made 25 cents an hour in a lumberyard and his mother cleaned houses and took in laundry. By his sixteenth birthday, Behring had worked a dozen jobs. After losing a football scholarship he dropped out of college and began selling cars. In time he opened his own dealership, made a pile of money, then turned to real estate. He made another pile, in Florida and then in California. Now he gives his money away, full time. His chief philanthropy delivers wheelchairs to disabled children in the Third World. But he had enough money left over to give to the history museum. He offered the Smithsonian's governing body, the board of regents, a gift of $80 million. With conditions.

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The new display of the Star-Spangled Banner

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

By its own account, the Smithsonian Institution, including the NMAH, is scandalously underfunded. Every government agency, by its own account, is scandalously underfunded. But the Smithsonian labors under peculiar burdens. Congress typically doesn't fund exhibits; if it did, politicians would be tempted to control their content. (This arrangement clearly frustrated McConnell.) Museum officials have to raise money for everything beyond personnel and maintenance from foundations and corporations. The money usually comes with no strings attached. Protected from outside political pressure, curators are free, self-consciously or not, to inject their own politics into the museum's shows, always under the guise of doing disinterested history. Sometimes, of course, a donor will indeed try to influence the content of a show. When the influence matches the inclinations and tastes of the curators, it is accepted as a worthy contribution to the increase and diffusion of knowledge; when it doesn't, protests ensue.

Behring hoped to tilt the museum toward "telling the whole American story," including exhibits that would celebrate extraordinary individuals rather than social movements and academic abstractions. But what he had in mind wasn't unprecedented. In the mid-nineties, the inventor Jerome Lemelson, who got rich by developing the machines that read bar codes, had had a revelation similar to Behring's. Visiting the museum, he was dismayed at the treatment of American inventors. They were scarcely to be found. "They just had the machines," he said, "not the people."

Lemelson didn't know at the time that their absence was a matter of curatorial design. NMAH had boasted that "in recent years the emphasis on individuals has given way to a more complex, collaborative story that better reflects the reality of invention and discovery in 20th century America. . . . [We] have downplayed individual genius in an attempt to portray the bigger picture of scientific and technological developments, the system and networks that produce change."

There's nothing a social historian likes better than a "system" and a "network," especially if it involves "complexity" and "change." Lemelson, however, thought this emphasis on the abstract shortchanged the unique contributions of the plucky dreamer tinkering under a bare light bulb in his garage after work—another part of the American experience the curators had ignored. Knowing that the Smithsonian was perpetually strapped for cash, Lemelson in 2001 offered $40 million to fund the Lemelson Center for the

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Study of Invention and Innovation, under the stipulation that its exhibits would concentrate "particularly on the individual inventor . . . to inspire a new generation to enter this all-American profession." The museum took the money and turned its attention to those plucky dreamers.

Lemelson proved that with a single stroke an outsider could alter the museum's approach to a historical subject—so long as the stroke was done with a pen, at the bottom of a check for $40 million.

A wealthy couple from the suburbs of Washington, Catherine and Wayne Reynolds, were less successful. In 2001, they offered the NMAH $38 million for a permanent exhibit, a "Hall of Achievers," that would showcase the lives of prominent Americans, winners of the Nobel prize and the Medal of Honor, businessmen and athletes, both the dead and the living. The purpose would be to "recognize the power of the individual to shape American life and impact the course of history." The Reynoldses signed a contract with the secretary of the Smithsonian, Lawrence Small, that was heavy with stipulations. Any contested decisions about the content of the exhibit were taken out of the curator's hands and given to Small, who was unambiguous about the kind of uplift the Hall of Achievers was meant to provide.

"It will send a clear message," Small said, "that with courage, with determination and hard work you can achieve your goals, no matter what the odds."

Curators were appalled. Much was made of the names the Reynoldses had suggested for the Hall, a list that swung wildly from the conventional (Martin Luther King) to the pop (Oprah) to the bizarre (Sam Donaldson). It was odd that curators who proudly display Jerry Seinfeld's "puffy shirt" should object to an exhibit highlighting Mary Lou Retton's contributions to American culture, but it wasn't the question of taste that provoked the curators' anger. The whole idea was a heresy against the reigning ideology of social history. "We're not a great man/great woman place," one longtime curator told the *Post*'s Bob Thompson. "This museum is about context, about putting people and events in place within the social fabric."

The Reynoldses shot back in the local papers. Wayne Reynolds told the *Post*: "It just frustrates those curators and 'scholars'—I use scholars in quotes, because I don't know what their credentials are—who for 30 years have been collecting movie posters and coins and ceramic pots. That there's somebody who comes in there who really doesn't have the emphasis on collecting but on inspiring kids, it freaks them out."

Within the Smithsonian, and in press reports, statements like this were taken as rank philistinism. One of the great accomplishments of social historians was to seize the intellectual high ground—to claim that their crabbed view of American history was the fruit not of politics or temperament but of rigorous professional training and vast learning—and that any view that differed from theirs was simple ignorance or, worse, intellectual boorishness. The curators' protests threatened to become an institutional mutiny. After 18 months of controversy, Small gave up. At his urging, the Reynoldses withdrew from the agreement and took their money with them.

Ken Behring was more careful and politic than the Reynoldses. Like them, he insisted that he have direct influence over the content of the exhibits he funded. But he kept his public statements to a minimum, and he never directly contested the expertise of the curators. And he started small.

"We need to have a chronology," Darman said. "We need it not just so people can get oriented but also so they can see a story unfolding."

His first donation of $4 million funded an exhibit dedicated to American presidents—individuals whose importance a social historian might have trouble discounting. The exhibit rescued many wonderful artifacts and introduced visitors to several historical figures they might not otherwise encounter in the museum: James Madison, for example, or Andrew Jackson, who'd previously appeared only as the genocidal architect of the Trail of Tears.

Yet even here you couldn't miss the awkwardness of social historians trying to do something they'd never done before. It was as though they'd been asked to write with their feet. The show was about individual persons who succeeded one another in a position of great power, but the curators somehow managed to avoid the "coercive category" of chronology. Instead objects appeared higgledy piggledy, grouped according to curatorial concepts: "Communicating the Presidency," "Life and Death in the White House," and so on. Curators also refused to make judgments about the significance of individual presidents relative to one another. So visitors were shown the desk on which Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence alongside Warren Harding's silk pajamas and the ballet slippers Chelsea Clinton wore in a recital during her father's second term—next to a jacket worn by Martin Sheen on the TV show *West Wing*.

The presidents exhibit was premonitory. Behring's next show was more expensive ($19 million), more explicitly traditional, and unambiguously patriotic. So it aroused more controversy. His agreement with Small and the museum

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called for a permanent exhibit "highlighting the history and contributions of the American people (but focusing primarily on the military's role) in preserving and protecting freedom and democracy." Behring said he wanted an exhibit "that shows young people how many people have given the ultimate price." And that was the title he chose for the show: "The Price of Freedom."

Again historians and curators were irate. They drafted a letter of protest to the board of regents. "Will the Smithsonian Institution actually allow private funders to rent space in a public museum for the expression of private interests and personal views?" Another complained sarcastically that "Price of Freedom" would make "a great recruiting exhibit" for the military. Advisory historians insisted the exhibit showcase the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War, conflicts that had less to do with freedom, one historian said, than with the "acquisition of territory and the subjugation of peoples."

Behring's agreement stipulated that he be consulted at every step. A designer was hired from outside the museum, Christopher Chadbourne, whose chief ambition in putting together exhibits, he said, is "to tell good stories." The result was an exhibit unlike any the museum had mounted before. "The Price of Freedom" is comprehensive and chronological, vivid and dramatic, loaded with artifacts to delight at least male children (lots of carnage, lots of weapons) and their parents (battle plans, uniforms, archival footage, the personal effects of military heroes). It was attentive to both the grunts in the trenches and the generals and politicians who, for better and worse, told them what to do. It's not purely celebratory of American arms—the dubious Spanish-American War is honestly portrayed, and a display on Hiroshima injects a dose of challenging ambiguity—but it's often moving, particularly in its concluding display, devoted to recipients of the medal of honor.

The show opened in 2004 and broke attendance records for a single exhibit. By then, aware perhaps of the museum's precarious finances and its dependence on Behring's good will, the NMAH Congress of Scholars could issue only a half-hearted protest, objecting to a small display on the Iraq war. In a letter to the regents, the scholars said that including mention of the invasion in an exhibit called "The Price of Freedom" suggested the war was—well, a fight for freedom. Such a judgment, the letter said, "runs counter to our neutral public mission." The display stayed where it was and has since been expanded.

From America's attic: Thomas Jefferson's desk, used for writing the Declaration of Independence; Muhammad Ali's boxing gloves; Kermit the Frog

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The changes Behring has brought to the museum, while significant, are scattered and precarious, hard to reverse but easy to curb. The donor was careful to give his efforts institutional cover. This was provided by a "blue ribbon commission" of Smithsonian outsiders that the regents impaneled, at Behring's insistence and with Small's encouragement. To lead the commission Small chose the late Richard Darman, a veteran Republican operative and dealmaker, assisted by Sheila Burke, a former aide to Bob Dole. The commission's report, issued in 2002, remains a touchstone in discussions of the future of the NMAH and an outline of the current renovation. Its language was bland in the institutional manner, but there were hints here and there of scold and exasperation, and its diagnosis was severe.

"The Museum does not seem to meet any obvious test of comprehensibility or coherence," the commission said. "Visitors often expect that a history museum should have a clear chronological structure. They cannot find this at NMAH. It does not exist. Nor is any other organizing principle evident."

Chronology, the commission said, would make a fine organizing principle. The report proposed an introductory exhibit that would greet visitors as they entered the museum, placing a timeline of the country's history, from precolonial times to our own, at the center of the building and at the center of the visitors' experience. Markers on the timeline could direct them at appropriate points to the special exhibits that treated individual subjects more deeply. Small strongly supported the idea, and was seconded by Brent Glass, appointed director of the NMAH after the report came out.

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"We need to have a chronology," Darman said in an interview not long before his death last year. "We need it not just so people can get oriented but also so they can see a story unfolding, with real human beings doing significant things, even as these broad forces are at work that the museum has always emphasized."

The commission had further ideas for the museum's staff: Rework the signage, open up the floor plan and let in some light, always keep the interests and habits of the public in mind, don't be too didactic, and get used to the idea that private donors will influence the exhibits they fund. And don't be afraid to "celebrate America's remarkable strengths and achievements."

The most expensive of the recommendations—the physical renovation of the museum, financed in part by Behring—was unveiled in those ceremonies last month, to spectacular effect. As for the others, signals are mixed. An exhibit dedicated to "American enterprise," first proposed by the commission, will open next year. "The Price of Freedom" remains, along with the "Presidents" and the "First Ladies," too, in a refurbished exhibit. Some kind of orientation exhibit is in the works, with a timeline to give visitors a sense of the sweep of American history.

And yet, and yet: The opening last month revealed fresh evidence that curators will continue to flog visitors with the wet noodle of social history. Now the entrance to each exhibition wing is "anchored" by a Landmark Object. Only two of the six landmarks—Clara Barton's ambulance and the lunch counter from a civil rights sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina—are tied to a significant person or event; among the four other landmarks are the telescope used by "America's first woman astronomer" and a car from the Dumbo ride in Disneyland.

In the lobby, display cases now greet visitors with 400 artifacts that range from the mundane to the inconsequential: household appliances and board games from the 1950s, computer prototypes from the 1980s, implements used by farm workers a couple years ago. One display climaxes with a manicure kit recently given to a Smithsonian curator by a Vietnamese-American beautician in Fairfax, Virginia. No wall text lets you in on what the historical significance might be. The "artifact walls" make for a less pretentious and more linear version of "A Material World," but they're just as random and anonymous. The only historically formidable figure referred to here is Elvis Presley, in a movie poster for *Viva Las Vegas*.

A slapstick from Vaudeville; a costume of Phyllis Diller's; the Puffy Shirt from "Seinfeld"

This is the museum reverting to default mode, and it's unclear where the pressure will come from to rouse it from its social history stupor. Brent Glass said that while editorial work proceeds on the timeline, he and his curators worry that "visitor research"—museumgoer focus groups—shows people are "turned off" by too many dates and facts, which can remind them of school. (They're teaching historical facts in school?) Still, Glass says he came to the NMAH in hopes of implementing the commission's recommendations, including its "intellectual change" toward a history that is more accessible, less obscure, and more dramatic. In that case he's outnumbered. Darman is dead, Small resigned last year after an expense-account scandal, and Sen. McConnell is a member of the permanent minority on Capitol Hill. The curators are back.

But Behring is still here, too. If he's worried or uneasy, he didn't show it the other morning, after the dedication ceremony. The president and first lady had left, the stage was being dismantled, and guests milled about in the new atrium, basking in the natural light. Behring stood looking around, hands in pockets, unrecognized.

"Very pleased," he said, when he was asked about the new NMAH. "Look at the light that's been let in! It will be a more friendly place. I think people are going to enjoy it more—especially young people. We're going to get across—yes, Americans made mistakes, and yes, we're going to talk about those—but we're going to get across to the young people that this is still the greatest country in the history of the world.

"And of course"—he looked around with a big smile—"we've got more work to do." ♦

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Pakistan's Jihad

In the war on terror, Islamabad is both with us and against us

By Bill Roggio & Thomas Joscelyn

Just two days after the gunmen's siege in Mumbai ended, Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari went on CNN's *Larry King Live* to plead his case. Even before the Indian authorities had brought the rampage to an end, they were laying blame on their neighbor to the north. And Zardari wanted the world to know they were wrong. "This is not the time to point fingers," Zardari protested. "The state of Pakistan is in no way responsible."

Instead, Zardari said, "I think these are stateless actors who have been operating all throughout the region. . . . The gunmen plus the planners, whoever they are, [are] stateless actors who have been holding hostage the whole world."

Zardari was partly right. In all likelihood, neither he nor his supporters had anything to do with the attacks. So, if you define the "state of Pakistan" as the president and his immediate cohorts, his words ring true. Of course, there is more to Pakistan's government, including its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the powerful military intelligence organization over which Zardari exerts little control. And there are good reasons to suspect that the ISI had a hand in the Mumbai attacks, which killed more than 180 people and wounded nearly 300.

The United States and India have named the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) terror organization as the main perpetrator of the attacks. Indian authorities captured the lone gunman to survive the assault, and he reportedly admitted being trained by the LET. India also claims to have intercepted phone conversations between the Mumbai attackers and one of the LET's leaders in Pakistan. The full investigation will take some time to unfold, so it is too early to name all of those responsible. It is, however, a safe bet that the LET was heavily involved.

Contrary to President Zardari's claims, the LET is no "stateless actor." In fact, the LET is and always was a creature of the ISI.

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Throughout the war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States, as well as other states, all sponsored the Afghan resistance fighters or mujahedeen. But Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were principally responsible for creating and sponsoring the most radical Islamic terrorist groups within the mujahedeen's ranks. This nexus is what first gave us Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda and, later, Mullah Omar's Taliban.

The same nexus also gave us the LET. In fact, bin Laden and his spiritual mentor, Abdullah Azzam, reportedly played instrumental roles in the LET's founding. In the late 1980s, they met with members of the Markaz-ud-Dawa-wal-Irshad (MDI), an Islamist political party in Pakistan, and convinced its leaders to create a militant wing responsible for waging jihad in Kashmir. The result was the LET. And the struggle for control of Jammu and Kashmir, territory sandwiched between China, India, and Pakistan that had been disputed since the partition of 1947, would never be the same.

As the war in Afghanistan came to an end, the ISI began to reallocate its resources. The jihadists had proven their merit as guerrilla fighters, and the ISI found it convenient to use them elsewhere. Veterans of the Afghan conflict formed the LET's first cadres, and, using Saudi cash, the ISI quickly expanded the LET's operations. By the early 1990s, the LET emerged as one of the ISI's primary instruments for waging its proxy war against Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

The consequences of the ISI's decision are plain to see. The conflict over Kashmir was relatively terror-free in the late 1980s, but just a few years later Islamist terrorist groups were launching thousands of attacks. As Praveen Swami, a reporter for *Frontline* magazine in New Delhi, explains in his book *India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad*, there were only 7 terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir in 1988. In 1992, there were 3,920. The total number of civilians killed per year, including Muslims, increased from less than 30 in 1988 to more than 1,000 in 1993. Data on the number of attacks and total casualties vary by source. But according to Swami's estimates, which we find to be conservative, more than 41,000 people, including Indian forces, terrorists, and civilians, died between 1988 and 2005.

India has played its part in the violence in Jammu and Kashmir, but the prime mover has been the ISI and its

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jihadist proxies, including the LET. The ISI not only gives these groups safe haven and trains and supplies them, it also frequently coordinates their movements. Consider one telling example. In 1999, conventional Pakistani and Indian forces fought for control of Kargil, a mountainous district in northern Kashmir. During the coldest weeks of the conflict, the Indians ceded the highest ridges for warmer ground below. After the Indians left their positions, LET members moved in. The LET held this strategic battleground until their replacements—regulars in Pakistan's army—arrived. Such is the depth of cooperation between the LET and Pakistan's military establishment.

The ISI launched the full-scale jihad in Jammu and Kashmir, but it did not stop there. The LET and several sister organizations also backed by the ISI began attacking India proper long ago. Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), another ISI creation focused on Kashmir, has often been the LET's partner in crime. So has the Hizb-ul-Mujahedeen (HM), which was founded with the ISI's help in the late 1980s. And an Indian-based organization called the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which is sponsored by the ISI and deeply connected to its Pakistani brethren, has been instrumental in launching attacks inside India. These four organizations have killed hundreds. According to the website *satp.org* (South Asia Terrorist Portal), these groups, along with other smaller allied jihadist organizations, are responsible for dozens of attacks inside India between September 2001 and October 2008.

Until this latest attack, the most devastating assault perpetrated by these groups in recent years occurred on July 11, 2006. On that day, terrorists detonated seven bombs on Mumbai's commuter rails. According to Indian officials, the LET and SIMI were responsible. The attack left more than 200 dead and 700 or so wounded.

It is in this context that 10 or more gunmen laid siege to hotels and other locales in Mumbai in late November. Far from being the work of "stateless actors," the attack was perfectly consistent with the ISI's longstanding policy of waging jihad against India and its interests. In fact, Indian authorities have reportedly found direct evi-

2001

Lashkar-e-Taiba militants escorted by Indian paramilitary troopers in Srinagar

2002

LET members under arrest in Jammu, for possession of arms and ammunition

2007

An alleged LET operative under arrest in Hyderabad.
The group is not a 'stateless actor' but a creation of Pakistan's intelligence service.

TOP AND MIDDLE, REUTERS / BOTTOM, ASSOCIATED PRESS

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dence of cooperation between the ISI and the LET in the latest attack. The ISI allegedly trained the LET terrorists responsible and provided other logistical support for the operation. Thus, when President Zardari went on CNN to proclaim Pakistan's innocence, he avoided any substantive discussion of the ISI's role.

Even so, Zardari's comments are not altogether meaningless. They touch upon a central fault line in this war on terror. The president of Pakistan has essentially admitted what we should all know by now: There is currently no political force inside Pakistan capable of reining in the ISI and its many jihadist allies. Zardari had hoped for improved relations with India, but he was powerless to stop the Mumbai attacks. The jihadist forces have become entrenched within Pakistani society, which is home to dozens of extremist and terrorist organizations.

Indeed, the extent of the radicalization of Pakistani society is deeply troubling. It is the direct result of decisions made by Pakistani administrations decades ago.

Itinerant preachers had made their way back and forth from the Arabian peninsula for centuries, carrying with them a form of Wahhabism, the official state religion of Saudi Arabia. In time, a Pakistani variant evolved into its own strain of radical Islam called Deobandism. While this made some inroads among Pakistanis, it was not until the late 1970s that Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq made it the official policy of the Pakistani state to support the Deobandis, and radical Islam blossomed.

As Charles Allen notes in his masterly work *God's Terrorists*, there were only 200 madrassas, or religious schools, on Pakistani soil at the time of the India-Pakistan partition in 1947. By 1972, this figure had grown to 893. Of these Pakistani madrassas, 354 (40 percent) openly espoused Deobandism. After President ul-Haq threw the full support of his military behind the movement and turned on the spigot of Saudi petrodollars, radical Islam really took off. In 2002, Allen notes, Pakistan's minister of religious affairs "put the total number of madrassas in Pakistan at ten thousand, of which . . . no fewer than seven thousand" are Deobandi. It was the proliferation of Deobandi madrassas that led directly to the birth of the Taliban, which follows the Deobandi creed and continues to find new recruits among students of Islam. The most radical madrassas instruct more than 1 million students each year and provide a comfortable abode for terrorists planning attacks.

One result is that today the president himself is not safe. The jihadist hydra nearly killed Zardari on September 20, when a truck bomb leveled the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad. Zardari had stopped off to chat with an old friend, narrowly avoiding death. The assassins were more successful with Zardari's wife, Benazir Bhutto, who was killed by jihadists in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, on December 27, 2007.

All of this has important ramifications not only for India and Pakistan, but also for the United States and the rest of the free world. There is no question that Pakistan has played an instrumental role in the war on terror. President Musharraf's regime, including friendly elements within the ISI, killed or captured hundreds of al Qaeda operatives in the wake of September 11. But it is now clear that the ISI's long-term strategy for seizing power throughout South and Central Asia by sponsoring jihadist proxies remains undeterred.

Moreover, this strategy conflicts directly with American interests. Just as the ISI created the LET and its sister organizations, the ISI has also been the primary benefactor of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Even as Pakistan gave the United States vital assistance in the war on terror, the ISI continued to sponsor America's enemies behind her back. There are numerous examples that can be cited.

Both NATO officers and Afghan officials have long maintained that the Taliban's Shura, or leadership council, is based in the Pakistani city of Quetta. In May 2006, Colonel Chris Vernon, then the chief of staff for Coalition forces in southern Afghanistan, told the *Guardian* that this was common knowledge. "The thinking piece of the Taliban is out of Quetta in Pakistan," Vernon said in an interview. "It's the major headquarters. They use it to run a series of networks in Afghanistan." Other anonymous U.S. and NATO officials backed up Vernon's statements.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai went so far as to say he knew the exact location of Taliban chieftain Mullah Omar and had passed on this information to the Pakistani government, only to have it ignored. "Mullah Omar is for sure in Quetta in Pakistan. And he knows that and I know that," Karzai told the Council on Foreign Relations in September 2006. "And we have given [President Musharraf] information. We have even given him the GPS numbers of his house, of Mullah Omar's house, and the telephone numbers."

Despite these warnings, the Taliban's leadership has remained free. The ISI has ensured their safety. But the ISI's complicity in the Taliban's and al Qaeda's terrorism goes far beyond the provision of safe haven.

Pakistani intelligence officers have been caught aiding America's foes inside Afghanistan. In December 2006, Afghan security forces captured Sayed Akbar, an ISI officer. Akbar had been tasked by Pakistani intelligence with serving as a conduit to al Qaeda, which was operating along the Afghan-Pakistani border in the Kunar region.

An aide to President Karzai told reporters that "evidence and documents [had] been seized with [Akbar] proving his destructive activities in Afghanistan." Afghan officials said Akbar confessed to conducting "illegal activities" in Afghanistan. According to Akbar, he had escorted Osama bin Laden

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as he traveled from Afghanistan's Nuristan province into the mountainous district of Chitral in northwestern Pakistan in 2005. While there have been numerous bin Laden sightings along the Afghan-Pakistani border, he was reported to have been sheltered in Chitral at this time. In fact, FBI agents visited Chitral in early 2006 to assess the reports.

Perhaps the most brazen example of the ISI's support for the Taliban and other terror groups operating in Afghanistan occurred in the mountainous Afghan border province of Nangarhar. Lieutenant Colonel Chris Nash, the commander of an embedded training team that advised Afghan border police, dropped a bombshell last September when his presentation on his time in Afghanistan from September 2006 to March 2007 made the rounds on the Internet.

A slide in the presentation claimed the ISI was supporting U.S. enemies fighting in Afghanistan. The slide read: "ISI involved in direct support to many enemy operations . . . classification prevents further discussion of this point." The support included "training, funding, [and] logistics."

Nash said multiple U.S. and Afghan intelligence reports indicated that the ISI "flew repeated helicopter missions into Afghanistan to resupply the Taliban during a fierce battle in June 2007," according to the *Army Times*. The ISI helicopters resupplied a "base camp" in the Tora Bora region in Nangarhar, where Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda fought pitched battles with the U.S. military and Afghan militias before retreating into Pakistan.

The camp was run by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, an insurgent group long sponsored by the ISI, as well as the Taliban and al Qaeda. "A helo flew in the valley, went over to where we knew there was a base camp, landed, [and] 15 minutes later took off," Nash said. The helicopters made three separate flights to resupply the joint insurgent force. "From NDS [Afghan intelligence] sources that we had in the opposing camp, [we know] they were offloading supplies," Nash told the *Army Times*. Nash explained that the resupply efforts took place over the course of three months.

The most recent and damning allegation of ISI perfidy in Afghanistan was leveled by U.S. intelligence after a suicide bomber rammed a car packed with explosives into the outer wall of the Indian embassy in Kabul. Fifty-four people, including an Indian defense attaché, were killed in the July 7 bombing.

The Indian embassy bombing was carried out by the

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notorious Haqqani Network, run by former mujahedeen leader Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Siraj. Both Jalaluddin and Siraj have close ties with al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden.

The Haqqanis have extensive links with al Qaeda and the Taliban, and their relationship with the ISI has allowed their network to survive and thrive in its fortress stronghold of North Waziristan. The Haqqanis control large swaths of the tribal area and run a parallel administration with courts, recruiting centers, tax offices, and security forces. They have established multiple training camps and safe houses used by al Qaeda leaders and operatives, as well as by Taliban foot soldiers preparing to fight in Afghanistan.

American intelligence agencies confronted the Pakistani government with evidence of direct ISI involvement in the bombing of the Indian embassy, the *New York Times* reported in August. "The conclusion was based on intercepted communications between Pakistani intelligence officers and militants who carried out the attack, the officials said, providing the clearest evidence to date that Pakistani intelligence officers are actively undermining American efforts to combat militants in the region."

The ISI officers involved in the Kabul bombings were not "renegades," the *New York Times* reported, and the intercepts indicated that "their actions might have been authorized by superiors." U.S. intelligence officials also said "elements of Pakistan's government seemed to be directly aiding violence in Afghanistan that had included attacks on American troops" and were providing intelligence to Taliban and al Qaeda operatives on the U.S. covert air campaign targeting terror leaders in Pakistan's tribal areas. The Haqqani Network has been a prime target of these attacks; almost 60 percent of U.S. airstrikes this year have occurred in North Waziristan.

In the wake of the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul, the ISI reshuffled its leadership. But the changes were most likely cosmetic. As the attacks in Mumbai illustrate, the ISI continues to sponsor terrorism. Indeed, the attacks in Mumbai were yet another wake-up call for the United States and the West.

Decades ago the ISI made a pact with the devil. There is no evidence that it can be redeemed any time soon. Given the ISI's deep roots within Pakistan's culture and its capacity to drive policy even against the wishes of the elected officials, curtailing the power of this rogue agency will be difficult at best. Indeed, the ISI is now one of the principal backers of radical Islam in the world.

The allure of Islamist extremism runs deep in Pakistan's officer corps. For many, this is an ideological war. Consider what "retired" ISI general Hamid Gul, who still exerts much influence in Pakistan, said in 2003:

> God will destroy the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan and wherever it will try to go from there. The Muslim world must stand united to confront the United States in its so-called War on Terrorism, which is in reality a war against Muslims. Let's destroy America wherever its troops are trapped.

The same mentality compels the ISI and its surrogates to claim territory in the name of Islam. Pakistan's jihad in India and Kashmir is not just the product of a decades-old geopolitical rivalry. For the ISI, it is part of a Manichaean struggle between the forces of Islam and the rest of the world. As Praveen Swami notes in his book, the LET's leadership has openly talked of conquering large swaths of India on behalf of Muslims. After the Kargil war of 1999, LET chieftain Hafiz Muhammad Saeed threatened, "The real war will be inside [India]." He swore his forces would "unfurl the Islamic flag on the Red Fort." As Swami explains, the Red Fort in New Delhi "has been a long-standing motif in Islamist Discourse, as old as Partition itself." It is no wonder that in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, the Indians have demanded that the Pakistanis turn Saeed over. But it is doubtful that the Pakistani military will comply.

In the current crisis, the military shows signs of closing ranks with extremist elements as fears of a conflict with India increase. Just days after the Mumbai attacks, an army corps commander described Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud as a "patriot" and said the conflict with the Taliban in the northwest was merely due to "misunderstandings." In turn, the Taliban-dominated tribes pledged to send three million fighters to the Indian frontier in the event of a conflict.

Past efforts to purge the military of officers sympathetic to or openly supportive of the extremist cause have had only limited success. Former President Pervez Musharraf conducted multiple purges of the ISI after the September 11 attacks and attempts on his own life, but they had limited effect. Recently, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, a Bhutto loyalist, tried to bring the ISI under government control, but met resistance. Within 24 hours, the announcement that the ISI would be placed under the office of the prime minister had been rescinded.

The United States is now faced with an awful truth. Pakistan is both an ally and an enemy. The attacks in Mumbai are only the latest demonstration of the tactics the ISI is willing to sponsor in its quest for power in the subcontinent and beyond. We should be mindful that ISI-sponsored terrorism is a central component of our enemies' worldwide designs. It should not come as a surprise if someday we find ISI-backed terrorists laying siege to New York or Washington, just as they lately brought carnage to Mumbai. ♦

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'Knight, Death, and the Devil' (1513) by Albrecht Dürer

RÉUNION DES MUSÉES NATIONAUX / ART RESOURCE, NY

End of the Road

On the journey to oblivion

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

If death is an old joke that comes to each of us afresh, how is it no one is laughing? Because, as an old radio comedy show tagline had it, "'Tain't funny, McGee." No, death is someone else, most assuredly not the person dying, having the last laugh. But who, and why? And what, exactly, is the joke anyway?

Julian Barnes, fair to say after reading *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*, his ironically tinged tirade on the unreasonableness of death, doesn't get the joke, and writes at some length about his confusion and consternation over the matter. The question, for Barnes, is why do we have to die at all? He doesn't quite see the point of it. What is more, as he doesn't in the least mind telling us, he is terrified of death. This terror set in at early adolescence, and far from diminishing, seems to have increased in intensity and frequency as the disappointing event itself draws ever nearer. Death, not to put too fine a point on it, seems to him a very raw deal, and *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* is an extended threnody on just how raw it is.

Nothing To Be Frightened Of
by Julian Barnes
Knopf, 256 pp., $24.95

A novelist, a member of the generation of English writers that includes Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, and Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes is the Francophile son of secondary school teachers of French. Best known for the novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, he would not, I think, disclaim or disdain being called a Flaubertian, for so he seems in his artistic taste, temperament, and general outlook. He is in his early sixties, childless by choice (he tells us), and recently made a widower upon the death of his wife, Pat Kavanagh, a well-known London literary agent. These biographical details are noteworthy, for *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*, though not intended as an autobiography, is nonetheless a highly autobiographical book.

Le réveil mortel, which Barnes translates as "the wake-up call to mortality," comes to people at different ages and stages in their lives. Death's alarm rings more insistently for some than others. Barnes claims to hear it at least once a day, often more: "as evening falls, as the days shorten, or towards the end of a long day's hiking," and other, less explainable times (he mentions its usual intrusion during the 6 Nations rugby tournament). Familiarity with the notion of death in him breeds neither contempt nor content—only fear.

Nothing To Be Frightened Of is, of course, an ironic title; Barnes finds everything to be frightened of about

Joseph Epstein, a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *is the author, most recently, of* Fred Astaire.

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death: its probable pain, its likely squalor, its surprise, more likely shock, element. But above all he cannot quite get his mind around its promise of the Big O—not Oscar Robertson nor Barack Obama, but Oblivion, the state of absolute nullity that, for a faithless man or woman, is the first and finally crushing result of death. Barnes grew up in a household without religion "so," as he writes, "I had no faith to lose." He found, he tells us, religion and the guilt it brings "distracted [me] from [adolescent] masturbation." He never attended church regularly, and regards the story of Christianity as "a great novel," nothing more. No other religion, one gathers, has had the least allure for him. People who have told him that finding faith would wipe out his terror and alleviate his anxiety about death are talking to a wall, and not to the Wailing Wall, either.

As a thanatophobe and a Francophile, it is only natural that Barnes cite and quote many French writers on the subject of death. Jules Renard, the 19th-century French writer, whose name and aphorisms come up frequently in this book, in his *Journal* notes: "It is when faced with death that we all turn most bookish." And so it is that Montaigne, Pascal, Stendhal, Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, and Zola are all brought briefly onstage in Barnes's book, then whisked off; so, too, are the views and fates of Ravel, Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, Sibelius; cameo roles are played by Thomas Browne, Edmund Wilson, Philip Larkin, and Bertrand Russell.

Barnes sashays between anecdotage about great artists and their (in his pages) inevitably horrific deaths and autobiographical accounts of his life with his parents and his disagreements on the subject of death with his older brother, a former philosophy don now living in France. His brother thinks fear of death irrational; Barnes thinks it the most rational thing in the world. He also includes material from Sherwin Nuland's *How We Die*, a study of the physiology of death so brutal it would bring Mean Joe Green to his knees in tears. Cryonics (or deep-freezing the body in the hope of finding future cures) is put under consideration and found no solution; big-picture reflections on long-term evolutionary theory, which holds out a future that figures to leave human beings no more complex than amoebas seem to us today, Barnes finds no less depressing to contemplate.

Not, as we should say nowadays, a fun book, *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*, despite Barnes's repeated efforts at gallows humor. Nor, because of the heavy freight of depression it carries, is it a book that can be read at just any time. I found myself not wanting to read about death at night; nor could I bear to begin my day by reading it fresh out of bed in the morning. Because of its dolorous subject, *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* reads as if twice its actual length. It is a book that would make a fine gift for someone one doesn't really like.

Julian Barnes

ERWIN ELSNER

Julian Barnes is a stylish writer, whose major flaw is his relentless cleverness, which derives in good part from his knowingness, a flaw shared by the English writers of his generation. (The reigning tic of the previous generation of English writers, Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin most notable among them, was heavy reliance on a no less relentless irony, in which they all may be said eventually to have drowned.) Yet for all his knowingness, one of the things Barnes doesn't know is how to rid himself of night sweats over the idea of his own death.

The best writer on death is Montaigne, whose essay "To Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die" provides, in effect, a how-to on dying. The point of Montaigne's essay is to take the fear out of dying. Montaigne's first bit of instruction is to familiarize oneself with death. To pretend it doesn't exist, or to put it out of mind, is, according to him, perhaps the greatest mistake one can make. Better to recognize death for what it is: the first fact of life—everything that lives must die. The mortality rate, unlike the stock market, has remained steady, never once having fallen below 100 percent.

Keep in mind the fact that one has already lived as long as one has is, in itself, extraordinary, for vast numbers of people have died much younger. Consider, too, that in having death always in mind, your own pleasures while alive, far from being diminished, ought to be intensified; you could, after all, long ago have been dead and not here to be eating that splendid veal chop and drinking that glass of magnificent cabernet sauvignon. Remember that no matter what the state of your health, or what precautions you have taken, there are no guarantees that you will have the least say in how your death will come about: Aeschylus, after all, was "killed by the shell of a tortoise which slipped from the talons of an eagle in flight."

The trick, for Montaigne, is "to deprive death of its strangeness; let us frequent it, let us get used to it; let us have nothing more often in mind than death." This seems to have worked for Montaigne, who himself never believed he would be long-lived. He died at 57, fairly long-lived for the 16th century. (His brother pegged out at 23, hit above the ear by a tennis ball.) We must all, he instructs,

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"have our boots on, ready to go." Fear of death will leave us without rest or tranquility, turning anxiety, anguish, and fear into our nearest companions. Only when we have taught ourselves how to die can we begin to live. Montaigne avers that he himself is ready to go, though he would like death to find him at his regular chores—planting his cabbages, perhaps. But "when death does suddenly appear, it will bear no new warning for me."

Although Montaigne's is easily the best, nonreligious manual for dealing with death, Julian Barnes doesn't buy it. When Montaigne argues that we die to make room for others to come on this earth, as earlier generations made room for us, Barnes replies: "Yes, but I didn't ask them to." When asked to think how many have died before him, and even how many are likely to die on the same day as he, he replies: "True, and some of them will be as pissed off as I am about it." When queried if he wants immortality here on earth, he replies: ". . . how about a little mortality? Half? OK, I'll settle for a quarter." This is the jokey Julian, who plays throughout this book, except that he's not quite joking, not really.

Barnes does not like the odds offered by Pascal's Wager, which holds that it makes sense to believe in God even if He may not exist, or for that matter the formulation of the bet, and suggests, instead, that "God might prefer the honest doubter to the sycophantic chancer." Strangely for a man drawn to the dour, he fails to quote Pascal's depiction of the human condition: "Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death, some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn. This is an image of the human condition." A genius, Pascal, but not many laughs.

Not merely death but dying itself worries Barnes. "Happiness in life," as Montaigne had it, "may never be attributed to any man until we have seen him act out the last scene in his play, which is indubitably the hardest." Montaigne, who died from a combination of illnesses, played his own part well. "It is striking how unanimous Montaigne's friends are," his biographer Donald Frame writes, "in his cheerful courage in the face of acute pain and death. Much as he loved life, death must have been in some measure a release."

Many are the exits from life, and few of them smooth. One looks great on Friday and is discovered to have a brain tumor the following Tuesday. *C'est la mort*. No one knows what awaits behind the door: One of the dread diseases of the nerves (Parkinson's, Lou Gehrig's, Huntington's); various dementias, Alzheimer's currently most famous among them; cancers of every kind, quick and slow killing, physically devastating and degrading; heart attacks and strokes; and—well, one needn't go on. Death is a restaurant with an enormous menu, not much on it appetizing.

Worse news yet, justice doesn't seem to enter into this, life's final transaction. As Montaigne points out, some of the "most execrable and ill-famed men I have known, men plunged into every kind of abomination, died deaths which were well-ordered and in all respects perfectly reconciled" while good men and women have died hideously. God, it too often seems, as the novelist Frederic Raphael says, does irony better than He does justice.

Julian Barnes reports no personal skirmishes with death, no accounts of suffering serious injuries or diseases, no scarifying surgeries. Physically, near as one can tell, he has himself had a pretty good run. Instead of describing his own tribulations he turns to the deaths of his grandparents and, more emphatically, his parents, both of whom died at the reasonable age of 82, his father after a series of strokes, his mother through a combination of strokes and dementia. Both died in impersonal surroundings—his father in a hospital, his mother in a nursing home—among strangers. Of his expectation for his own death, Barnes writes:

> I imagine I shall die rather as my father did, in a hospital, in the middle of the night. I expect that a nurse or doctor will say that I just "slipped away," and that someone was with me at the end, whether or not this will have been the case. I expect my departure to have been preceded by severe pain, fear, and exasperation at the imprecise or euphemistic use of language around me.

Throughout *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* Barnes pursues his mother in death as relentlessly as fear of death pursues him in life. He presents her as domineering, sarcastic, stinting of affection, the stifling cause behind his father's laconic manner.

"I incline to think that the strongest feeling Mother ever allowed herself was severe irritation," he writes, "while Father no doubt knew all about boredom." He reports his mother remarking, about her philosopher and novelist sons: "One of my sons writes a book I can read but can't understand, and the other writes books I can understand but can't read." (One assumes her son Julian is the latter.) He shows little mercy, and less forgiveness, for his mother, as she pits her obdurate personality against the strokes that left her right side paralyzed and her speech badly damaged. But then, nobody ever claimed Barnes was a Christian—he least of all.

At times, one cannot help wondering if *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* isn't Julian Barnes's contribution to the recent books by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, & Co. happily proclaiming their authors' atheism. Barnes reports that his hero Flaubert "was suspicious of militant atheism" and Barnes senses that the only confident answer to the spectre of death, apart from the dignified resignation that comes with accepting your fate, lies in religion. But religion is impossible for him, and the reason is that he makes too literal demands upon it. He wants religion to be accounted for and defended on coolly rational grounds. "Faith," he writes, "is about believing precisely what, according to all known rules, 'could not have happened.'" Barnes has himself never felt the invisible, and as a

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writer, a word-man, is insufficiently impressed with the unspoken.

He is almost too pleased not to be a Christian. He quotes Sir Thomas Browne: "For a pagan there might be some motives to be in love with life, but, for a Christian to be amazed at [that is, terrifed of] death, I cannot see how he can escape this dilemma—that he is too sensible of this life, or hopeless of the life to come." Barnes adds that he is Browne's unsatisfactory Christian—"too sensible of this life, or hopeless of the life to come—except that I am not a Christian." Rejecting Christianity, uninterested in other religions, he rejects the possibility of God.

Supposing that death could be eliminated and life could go on forever, Barnes sets out the manifold possibilities it would present to him in particular:

> I would become Jewish (or try, or bluff). I could leave home earlier, live abroad, have children, not write books, plant hornbeams, join a utopian community, sleep with all the wrong people (or at least, some different wrong people), become a drug addict, find God, do nothing. I could discover quite new sorts of disappointment.

Yes, without death, life would be a dream, sha-boom, sha-boom. More likely, though, it would be a ponderous thumping bore, with each of us telling our same anecdotes and jokes, enacting our same self-dramatizations, millennium after millennium. "Imagine life without death," Jules Renard wrote. "Every day you would want to kill yourself." Each of us would live for himself alone; for reasons of limited space and food supply, further generations would be unthinkable. "The truth of life," as Santayana noted, can "be seen only in the shadow of death: living and dying [are] simultaneous and inseparable." No one wants to die, but the only thing worse than dying would be living forever. Eliminate death and life becomes shapeless, a dud, perpetual hell on earth—something that Julian Barnes and the rest of us would all be truly frightened of. ♦

Morandi at the Met

An artist, 'with much faith in Fascism,' gets a second look. **BY MAUREEN MULLARKEY**

A painter's painter and one of Italy's most admired, Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964), took his time.

"It takes me weeks to make up my mind which group of bottles will go well with a particular colored tablecloth," he said. "Then it takes me weeks of thinking about the bottles themselves, and yet often I still go wrong with the spaces. Perhaps I work too fast?"

That rhetorical tease hints at the self-possession of an artist who also took time to cultivate the image of himself as a solitary genius, isolated from modernist movements and fascist career networks. A wide circle of influential friends, many of them writers and intellectuals, facilitated the posture. They hastened to gloss his crafted—and aggressively guarded—persona as an apolitical outsider. A 1945 catalogue essay by the art historian and collector Roberto Longhi set this tone of approach by referring to "the monastic Morandi in his cell." It was an edifying characterization but a pious fable.

Despite critical and financial success in his lifetime, Morandi has remained, since his death, a sidebar to the 20th century canon, and the first full survey of his work in the United States, the recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is part of an effort —begun in 2001 at London's Tate Modern—to widen his audience and establish his place on the art historical time line. And, it follows, on the auction block.

At the Met, with some 110 paintings, etchings and watercolors on view, every phase of his work was represented. Here were the iconic still lifes, noiseless and austere in their muted color scale and spatial ambiguities. Rare self-portraits, several handsome landscapes, flower paintings, and a commanding group of etchings are included. It was a select gathering from collections originally assembled in collaboration with Morandi himself, who steered sales of his work to those scholars, critics, and wealthy connoisseurs who could advance his career. His patrons, including major and minor players in Mussolini's regime, were men of taste.

The formal structure and spatial organization of Morandi's paintings place him at the heart of the modernist undertaking. Lessons learned from Cézanne appear in the linear evasions of homely items compressed on a tabletop, like distilled architecture. His subdued palette echoes the ochres, browns, pinks, and brick reds of Bologna's old colonnaded buildings. The same household objects repeat like mantras throughout his work, each adjustment between them finely calibrated to break the silence—some would say monotony—of the whole.

The narrowness of his range, its compositional encores and refrains, can be misleading. His distinctions are penetrating but so discreet you have to work at observing them. No middle ground exists for the audience: These subtle shifts of tone and perspective either captivate (as they do me) or bore. To seek infinity in an arrangement of bottles is an acquired taste.

From the standpoint of pure painting, this was a welcome show; but it stumbled as a cultural event. More than an invitation to the felicities of paint, an exhibition is also a social fact, a material prompt to historical under-

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standing. The Met's obligation is to cultural memory, not to marketing myths; accordingly, it drained culture of meaning by introducing Morandi in near-devotional terms. Or as Umberto Eco trills in the last commissioned line of the catalogue: "Morandi spent his entire life addressing the problem of the redemption of matter."

Less messianic—and more to the point of his rise to prominence in a nasty time—are Morandi's own words: "I have had much faith in fascism since its first inklings, faith that has never ebbed, not even in the darkest and most tumultuous moments."

Born into a prosperous Bolognese family, Morandi was raised in a villa on the outskirts of the city. He was 19 when his father died and the family moved, with a live-in housekeeper, to an apartment on the via Fondazza. Morandi stayed there with his sisters until he died. He worked and slept in the same room surrounded by the bottles, boxes, vases, and canisters of his still life repertory. The man never left Italy until, at age 66, he went twice to exhibitions in Switzerland. Such is the skeleton of "the Morandi myth."

Put flesh on the bones, however, and the story turns labyrinthine, even devious, and unreconcilable with the received image of the artist as the lonely embodiment of some lost ideal.

Italy was a new country and a largely poor one at the beginning of the 20th century; it would not have been uncommon for unmarried siblings to share a household. Besides, Morandi's sisters were sophisticated professionals, not the old maids of popular imagination. Fluent in French, two of them taught in Egypt and Tunisia before returning to Bologna in 1935. Rooms were hung with original works, among them drawings by Seurat and Rousseau, a Rembrandt etching and one by Ingres, a Baroque painting by Giuseppe Crespi and small pieces from the 14th-century Bolognese school.

Morandi was hardly cloistered on the via Fondazza. A frequent visitor to the Uffizi, he traveled to nearly every art exhibition, contemporary or historical, held in Italy in his lifetime. Gallery and museum catalogs kept him abreast of modernist activity abroad; foreign visitors were always welcome. Janet Abramowicz's groundbreaking 2004 monograph, meticulously documented and based on Morandi's personal record book, demolished his politically neutral, reclusive pose. It revealed his expedient use of the fascist unions and laws to obtain better teaching positions and opportunities to exhibit and sell his work. A beneficiary of the new cultural policies, he negotiated the hubris of a lethal regime with the same quiet finesse he brought to painting. He continued to describe himself as "a simple provincial professor of etching who sought no recognition."

'Still Life' (1950)

2008 ARTIST RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK / SIAE, ROME / ART RESOURCE

At the Met, curatorial piety omitted any hint that Morandi's success was decisively linked to the rise of fascism. The exhibition was an impressive package that succeeded in presenting Morandi as he wanted himself presented. Abramowicz's catalogue entry is restricted to discussion of his etching technique. In life, Morandi kept a firm grip on what was written about him, demanding editorial control and thwarting publication of his extensive network of well-placed contacts. If he were still censoring from the grave, he could not improve the entries—elegant spirals of fumy erudition—the Met provided for him. The fascist tag-along disappears behind smoke.

The artist's political allegiances do not bear on the loveliness of his formal achievement; yet his sympathies remain deeply relevant to the way in which we understand art's place in the larger culture. At a time when art itself has become the *lectio divina* of a secular culture, it matters greatly how much authority society cedes to the deficient, flexible spirituality accessible through art. Sensitivity to tone and contour has no moral weight comparable to sensitivity to evil.

Umberto Eco was 13 when the partisan resistance wrested control of Milan in 1945. A decade ago, he commented on that moment: "It was a point of pride to know that we Europeans did not wait passively for liberation. And for the young Americans who were paying with their blood for our restored freedom it meant something to know that behind the firing lines there were Europeans paying their own debt in advance."

That Morandi was not one of them is nothing against his art. But it points to the gulf between our proliferating machinery of art appreciation and the springs of a humane culture. ♦

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Whirlwind Gibbs

The pride of the 'New Yorker,' ripe for recovery.

BY THOMAS VINCIGUERRA

Imagine a writer who, by his mid-thirties, had published more than a million words in the *New Yorker*. Imagine one who turned out trenchant fact pieces, cutting yet perceptive criticism, finely wrought short stories, and hilarious vignettes. Imagine him doing all that despite a loveless childhood, desperate alcoholism, and terrible depression.

Now imagine him almost completely forgotten.

Meet Wolcott Gibbs, dead 50 years this year and the man who, perhaps more than anyone else, helped realize Harold Ross's vision of the *New Yorker* as the epitome of smart metropolitan journalism. During his 31 years at what he called "that nervous weekly," Gibbs was regularly mentioned in the same breath as E.B. White and James Thurber. Yet if anyone remembers him today, it's mainly for a throwaway line from his 1936 parody of *Time*, which lampooned that magazine's infamous topsy-turvy narrative structure: "Backward ran sentences until reeled the mind."

There was much more to Gibbs than that. He was, in fact, the archetypal Algonquinesque *New Yorker* figure, always viewing the world through a sardonic lens, expressing what he saw in piercing prose. When Ross declared in his famous prospectus that the *New Yorker* "will hate bunk," it was as if he had envisioned Gibbs as his chief debunker. Gibbs's unique voice was most apparent in the many years he spent as the first-string drama critic, during which he routinely dispatched Broadway dross with pointed disdain:

> When the curtain goes up on William Saroyan's play called *The Beautiful People*, it discloses a set that might have been executed by Salvador Dali, needing, in fact, only a rubbery watch and a couple of lamb chops. (1941)

> Total imbecility is something rarely achieved, even on Broadway, but I think that *Second Best Bed*, a sort of rigadoon on Shakespeare's grave, can modestly claim to have come very close to it. (1946)

> Moths fly out of pocketbooks, hats fly off heads, pants fly loose from their moorings, and the ghost of comedy flies out the window, mewing like a gull. (*Mike Todd's Peep Show*, 1950)

"God, he's brilliant," said one awestruck admirer. "He doesn't like anything." To which Ross replied, "Maybe he doesn't like anything, but he can do everything."

It was true. Gibbs was probably the most versatile *New Yorker* staff member ever. He wrote innumerable "Talk of the Town" pieces and inherited from E.B. White the apparently inimitable job of composing "Notes and Comment," those gossamer-like, quasi-editorial jottings that led off the magazine. For a while, he reviewed movies—90 percent of which, he declared, were "so vulgar, witless, and dull that it is preposterous to write about them in any publication not intended to be read while chewing gum." Other staffers handled columns about the press, books, and nightlife; Gibbs wrote all of these, and others.

His profiles were sharp and fiercely honest, imbued with a fine sense of the ridiculous. His devastating takedown of Thomas E. Dewey, which depicted him as a headline-grabbing, ambitious opportunist, was capped by this vivid description of Dewey's eyes: "These are brown, with small irises surrounded by a relatively immense area of white, and Dewey has a habit of rotating them furiously to punctuate and emphasize his speech, expressing horror and surprise by shooting them upward, cunning by sliding them from side to side behind narrowed lids."

He once wrote of his friend Burgess Meredith, "At the moment it has seemed to him suitable to let his ginger-colored hair grow long on top, so that in dimmer lights he looks rather like a chrysanthemum."

Ross called Gibbs's mastery of both fiction and nonfiction "bisexual." His casuals were as good as anything that Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, et al. ever wrote, and he was the *New Yorker*'s premier parodist. He could effortlessly ape Hemingway's terse philosophizing ("It is a strange world, and if a man and a woman love each other, that is strange too, and what is more, it always turns out badly") or Noël Coward's sparkling self-indulgence ("To this day I haven't the slightest idea why social upheaval should invariably be attended by extreme personal inconvenience to those whose interest in it is, to put the thing mildly, academic").

Rare among writers, Gibbs was also a superb editor, able to massage the work of others into publishable shape. Frequently, he would cut a manuscript into paragraphs with scissors, reorder them, fashion the appropriate transitions, and then line-edit the thing from start to finish. Thus did he practice what he wryly preached: "Try to preserve an author's style if he is an author and has a style."

Not everyone approved of Gibbs's rough treatment; he once drove his good friend John O'Hara to explode, "You're *f—ing* my story!" But Ross relied on Gibbs so heavily that his influence came to be felt in almost every corner of the magazine, down to the Tuesday afternoon art meetings where hundreds of cartoons were discussed. When Gibbs told the actress Patricia Collinge that he was going to retire, she was aghast. "Oh please, please don't," she pleaded. "We *need* you." In short, Gibbs was

Thomas Vinciguerra, a deputy editor of The Week, *is writing a biography of Wolcott Gibbs.*

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the *New Yorker*'s indispensable man.

He was also one of its saddest. Rarely did he believe in either his work or himself. Gibbs honestly thought that writing was "a ludicrous pastime" and that "play criticism was a silly occupation for a grown man." Once, upon handing a piece to fiction editor Gus Lobrano, he hastened to add, "I wouldn't have my name on it for anything in the world, and if I were an editor I would reject it quicker than the human eye."

For all the *New Yorker*'s prestige, Gibbs couldn't help but feel he was a mere comic paragapher. "I should really be writing novels," he would grouse, "not 'Talk of the Town' pieces." In an effort to be taken more seriously, he wrote several abortive plays and musicals. In 1950 he did score a hit with his Broadway comedy *Season in the Sun*, which ran for 10 months. To his mind, though, he had only demonstrated "that damn near anybody can write anything."

So insecure was he that simple human contact could be torture for him. Gibbs "glided past like a ghost," said Edmund Wilson. "His eyes always seemed to be closed." Crowds made him nervous. At one party, recalled Thurber's wife Helen, Gibbs "took one look inside the room, shrugged his shoulder in that funny way of his, and ran." One of his colleagues, Frank Modell, said that he never saw Gibbs smile.

"I suppose he was the unhappiest man I've ever known," said his good friend S.N. Behrman. "I used to talk to him endlessly about his impressive gift; it made no impression on him."

Considering his upbringing, Gibbs's sour outlook was, perhaps, inevitable. He had come from prestige and wealth. His ancestors included two governors, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a cabinet member, and Martin Van Buren. The family had made its fortune in shipping, but Gibbs's paternal grandfather lost most of the money, and his engineer father, Lucius, failed too, never realizing his dream of developing a practical electric car. Lucius died when he was 39, leaving the six-year-old Gibbs and his infant sister in the care of their alcoholic mother and relatives who lavished little affection on them. Much of his childhood was spent in boarding schools.

Deprived of emotional sustenance, Gibbs grew up vulnerable, pessimistic, and suspicious. He sought love but rarely found it ("I wonder if there is something the matter with me that I can't like anybody for long") and married three times, more or less on impulse on each occasion. His first union lasted only briefly; his second, to a *New Yorker* promotion writer, ended in her suicide and drove him into deep despair. The great love of his life was the novelist Nancy Hale, with whom he was involved in the early 1930s: "I am never going to be in love with anybody but you," he told her, "and I suppose I might as well get used to the idea in spite of all the nervous breakdowns it gives me." Unfortunately Hale, still married to her first husband and with a baby son, broke off the affair.

Wolcott Gibbs

LEONARD MCCOMBE

In 1933, very much on the rebound, Gibbs married Elinor Mead Sherwin, a Wellesley dropout and former silent-film actress and model. Elinor was pretty, smart, and urbane; St. Clair McKelway thought them the most attractive couple in New York. But they were both too strong-willed to make a completely successful marriage. They remained devoted to each other, but they settled down to a union that neither could quite endure or entirely escape.

"They lived in the same house," recalled a family friend, "but beyond that it wasn't much."

Not surprisingly, like many a gloomy scribe before him, Gibbs sought refuge in the bottle. Often he would stagger to the theater, slump in his chair, and collapse. "At a party Gibbs was good for about two hours," remembered David Cort, an editor at *Life*. "After that he didn't fight, he dissolved, and had to be carried." Once, while drunkenly slicing up a steak, the meat slipped off his plate. Cursing, Gibbs got down and proceeded to carve it on the floor.

Periodically he would retreat to sanitariums to dry out; sometimes he would briefly manage to stay on the wagon. But he was convinced that alcohol helped define his identity, and in one casual column, he wrote of an alter ego named Munson who swore off booze, only to find it "a tiresome mistake" because "the gift of repartee left Munson the day he drank his last Martini."

Gibbs channeled his disillusion into his writing. He would come to deploy his wit preemptively, wounding others before they could do the same to him, using words as both sword and shield. He even looked the part of the all-knowing, sophisticated critic: An elegant dresser with a taste for tattersall vests, he sported a delicately trimmed mustache and an ever-present cigarette. Behind owlish glasses, he would squint with one eye and superciliously cock the brow of the other, as if everything around him were beneath contempt.

The posturing won him many enemies. Outraged producers complained that he was too drunk to appreciate their plays. Some of his peers suspected, not without reason, that his first impulse was to childishly trash anything that came his way. Gibbs,

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Dawn Powell concluded, represented the worst of a nihilistic literary movement she called "The Destroyers."

> They have perverted their rather infantile ambitions into destruction of others' ambitions and happiness. If people are in love, they must mar it with laughter; if people are laughing, they must stop it with "Your slip is showing." They are in a permanent prep school where they perpetually haze each other. They destroy their own happiness by being ashamed of whatever brings it; they want to be loved but are unloving; they want to destroy but be themselves saved.

In Gibbs's case, that was far from the whole truth. He was always happy to praise good work (he thought *Harvey* "a work of pure enchantment—touching, eloquent, and lit with a fresh, surprising humor") and was devoted to such friends as Behrman, O'Hara, and Charles Addams. When Benchley, his predecessor as theater critic, died, he wrote, "He was one of the most courteous men I ever knew, in the sense that whenever he was aware of a feeling of insecurity or inadequacy in anyone he met, he was automatically their genial, admiring ally against the world."

Most of all, he loved Fire Island, the barrier beach off the South Shore of Long Island where he had a second home for more than 20 years. It inspired nine of his short stories in the *New Yorker*, which in turn provided the basis for *Season in the Sun*. Among the few happy memories of Gibbs's childhood were the summers he spent with his aunt's family in nearby Merrick; on Fire Island, he could recapture those lazy, sun-drenched days:

> I guess I really like it here better than any place in the world, he thought, and for the moment his delight in Fire Island, in this one place where life could be slowed to the almost forgotten tempo of childhood seemed as much as he could bear. The distance from New York, by train and boat, was only fifty terrestrial miles, but in spirit it was enormous. You ate and slept in the dark, untidy little houses that lay along the dunes between the sea and the bay, but most of your life was spent on the loveliest beach in the East, a narrow, sunny shelf that ran thirty miles along the Atlantic, from Babylon to Quogue, and here you just lay in the sun, and all the staggering complexity of your relations with others, the endless, hopeless bookkeeping of your personal morality with too many people, could be put aside for a little while.

In the end, even so idyllic a Valhalla couldn't save him from his demons. Weakened by years of drinking and smoking, as well as a 1947 operation for pleurisy he never quite got over, Gibbs died on August 16, 1958. Privately, a distraught Elinor suspected suicide.

Gibbs was only 56 when he died, and never got the recognition he deserved. But his colleagues were jarred by the loss, and E.B. White captured his memory in an obituary. He recalled one of Gibbs's funniest and most touching casuals, about the time he played Puck in a prep-school version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His director had told him, "I want you to be a little whirlwind." And so, covered like a jester in jingling bells, Gibbs did as he was instructed—and proceeded to drown out most of the dialogue.

"He was, in all truth, a whirlwind," wrote White, "and in these offices can still be heard the pure and irreplaceable sound of his wild bells." ♦

Reality Bites

As millions tune in, Losers become Winners.

BY NATALIE BOSTICK

Once upon a time there was a man named Richard Simmons. Richard was a sweet man with a big heart, and if you were fat, Richard would be your friend. Thanks to television you could aerobicize with Richard or deal your meals through Richard, and you lost a little weight.

Alas, Richard came with silly little gym shorts and bad hair. He sat down with David Letterman for some very self-deprecating interviews—which, if you were thin by then, you found funny. But what most people didn't know was that if you were *really* fat, Richard would visit you at home or call you on the phone even after the cameras stopped rolling.

Richard Simmons, now over 60, has disappeared from the weight loss landscape. In the current cultural war on fat his style was too low-tech, too mom-and-pop. Today, we want professionals to help us slim down: Trainers and nutritionists and computerized metabolic counters. If you don't believe me, just watch *The Biggest Loser*, NBC's weight loss reality contest, now in its sixth season.

With muscles tastefully defined under their ironic T-shirts and cargo shorts, trainers Bob Harper and Jillian Michaels represent both the means and the ends of the show. Constantly pushing her long brown hair back in frustration, Jillian describes her workouts as "beatings, beatings, and more beatings." She likes to make people cry so they can get to the emotional root of their fatness.

Bob, as the show's resident yogi (and with a slight Southern accent), appears to be the softer side of the duo. But Bob likes to win, and he punishes people who get in his way. Together with a medical staff, they push out-of-shape contestants to target weights at incredible speed. In the end, the successful contestants go home to become motivational speakers and trainers themselves.

I have, I must admit, watched *The Biggest Loser* since its inception. Reducing one's life to a calorie equation is a study in rational choice that, formerly, only economists dreamt about. But starting

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with Season One in the fall of 2004, fat Americans began to live out this thought experiment for our entertainment.

Some of them were huge; some you wouldn't notice in the checkout line at Wal-Mart. They were all doing and getting worked up over the stupidest things. In the pressure cooker that was the *Biggest Loser* House, consuming extra calories by, say, tasting a cupcake, could pose a real moral dilemma. In addition there were pantry confessionals, an ominous industrial scale, and some really excellent original orchestral music leading them through their intense workouts.

Refrigerators containing his "trigger" foods went dark when a contestant was eliminated. A healthily plump Caroline Rhea seemed to take the whole thing as a joke: "I'm sorry, you are *not* the biggest loser," she would say, unconvincingly.

It was so camp; I was hooked.

Five seasons later, a lot has changed. Gone are the pantry confessionals. An additional trainer, Kim Lyons, didn't last. Rhea has been replaced by the pert Alison Sweeney, whose weight fluctuates but only in negative correlation with her fertility. The contestants, whom we'll just call Losers, are cast as pairs and, having watched the show for years, are now very sophisticated players. They throw Weigh-Ins and Challenges in order to manipulate their standings against other players: One of them even "drank" a shot of M&Ms to that end. But the prize, you see, is still $250,000.

Earlier in 2004, a reality show called *My Big Fat Obnoxious Boss* aired on Fox. Modeled after Donald Trump's *Apprentice*, the show took 12 contestants to compete for a high profile position with a legendary employer. Going in, the contestants were given no further details: which boss, whose company, it didn't matter. They went after the prize with the kind of energy only people who hate their jobs seem to have. They ran office exercises on a paintball course and tried to sell products such as reusable toilet paper.

The show was a hoax. The CEO was an actor who described his character as someone who "probably has a number of sexual harassment lawsuits pending." My husband and I thought it was hilarious, but the show was cancelled after a few weeks.

Presumably the biggest idiot, or the most desperate contestant, won *MBFOB*. But the joke was on him. In contrast, *The Biggest Loser* plays it straight, despite the irony of using television to preach an active lifestyle. The contestants go happily along, even when forced to race down North America's largest Slip 'n' Slide in their underwear. The camera zooms way in, making synecdoche of beer bellies and "muffin tops."

Nicole Michalik, Dec. 18, 2007

ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's okay, we're "changing lives." This Oprahesque self-importance, and the show's insipid theme song, disguise the obvious: If you go on a television show and try to lose 50 percent of your body weight in three months, your primary goal is not fitness. (Why do you think they complain so much about their "last chance" workout?) It's a get-rich-quick scheme with the Losers in a race to see who can offer the show the cheapest return on excess calories.

Speaking of returns, I have to wonder how the Losers feel about all the shilling they do on camera. The show has perfected a technique of product embed surely designed to foil DVRs across America. Dutifully, the Losers gather to hear their trainers in scripted segments explain that, when they get hungry, they just chew Extra sugar-free gum. Surprise, the Losers win packs of Extra during their next Challenge! Visibly disturbed by Losers who won't taste cauliflower, celebrity chef Rocco DiSpirito teaches them to prepare mussels. In the microwave. It's so easy with Ziploc steam bags. Cue the Ziploc commercial at the next break.

Despite their efforts, I remain skeptical that Jenny-O lean turkey is the Losers' favorite brand of protein, or that none had eaten at Subway before coming on the show. I don't believe that any chef would recommend mussels microwaved *en Ziploc* to people skittish about seafood.

If you wanted to watch a television program about obesity in America, you missed Shaquille O'Neal's excellent 2007 program, *Shaq's Big Challenge*. On that show, Shaq used his celebrity to argue for better nutrition in the school lunch program and physical education for all public school students in the state of Florida. It was an intelligent and sensitive look at a serious issue.

Naturally, when I heard that this season's *Biggest Loser* would be focused on families, I thought the show was headed in that direction. I pictured Bob and Jillian teaching families to love sports and having serious talks about nutrition. Certainly there is a need: During the first episode Bob surprised Losers Vicky and Brady at their local doughnut shop. Their daughter, 64 pounds at four years old, continued to reach for the doughnuts as her parents celebrated the news of being selected for the show. Neither they nor Bob stopped her.

It's business as usual on the *Biggest Loser* campus. Maybe she'll be a contestant in the coming years. ♦

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Unfit to Print

The self-inflicted wounds of a newspaper enterprise.

BY WILLIAM MURCHISON

Edna Ferber made a handsome career spinning dynastic tales (*Giant*, *Showboat*, *Cimarron*, etc.) centered on the ages-old theme roughly summarized as gosh-you-never-know-how-life-will-work-out.

As with cattle ranches, so with communications empires—which, in the turbulence of the Internet age, have been looking far less imperial than formerly: sagging circulation, the flight of advertising, that sort of thing. Justifiable pride in family traditions of ownership and public service gives way to financial reality.

Belo
From Newspapers to New Media
by Judith Garrett Segura
Texas, 336 pp., $50

A case study in modern media transition and transformation is the Belo Corp. of Dallas, owner of the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Providence Journal*, and various TV stations, an empire seemingly on the wane after a burst of muscle-flexing in the 1980s and '90s. What I mean is, Belo *will* be a case study some day, but not quite yet. Judith Garrett Segura's account of Belo's stormy passage through modernity trails off uncertainly: nothing resolved, plenty of issues still hanging around, such as what does it mean in the 21st century to inform, guide, and befriend a large city and metropolitan area?

I myself labored for 28 years in the vineyards of the *Dallas News* before commencing a stint in academia, and Segura's perspective and my own do not, shall we say, overlap at every point. I hope, all the same, to do justice to her account, which is of a staid, generally self-satisfied family company energized in the 1980s by younger members of the dynasty, and now—

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Now, what? Segura leaves the question dangling delicately, and no wonder. In the first quarter of 2008 the newspaper (as opposed to the TV) side of the corporation lost $8.7 million. For the six-month period that ended in March 2008 circulation in Dallas fell 10.6 percent. It was the biggest such hit any of the country's 20 largest newspapers took in the period. A round of layoffs in 2004 preceded buyouts that sheared from the paper its architecture critic, its lead movie critic, and a widely-quoted TV critic, among many others. A newspaper once renowned in the Southwest for its careful attention to literature lacks a book critic. An award-winning religion section disappeared. Robust editorial viewpoints receded toward the middle.

Other American newspapers (the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Los Angeles Times*) have suffered similar affronts to pride and sense of duty; the *News*'s stumble was more precipitous. A generational leadership change that began in the 1970s and achieved consummation in the '80s brought the paper triumphantly through an old-style newspaper war with the crosstown *Dallas Times Herald* (which expired in 1991). Management poured money into the news operation, beefed up the newsroom, acquired a handful of smaller newspapers, and generally looked fit for the future.

Segura, a former archivist for the paper, cheerleads for the new management structure and for its enterprises and missions, which she sees as leading the *News* away from pre-Enlightenment obsessions such as tight control by a small family clique (the company went public years ago), avoidance of red ink on the business side, and, perhaps, worse: devotion to conservative causes and candidates.

The old *Dallas News* was, indeed, a "conservative" enterprise, in the sense that it backed conservatives for public office and moved not-too-briskly—though not-too-slowly, either—to acknowledgment of profound societal changes. The paper didn't like "the sixties" very much, though it refused to straitjacket the bona-fide characters it employed: e.g., Texas columnist-historian-"chili head" Frank X. Tolbert and sportswriters Bud Shrake and Gary Cartwright. Their individuality and, sometimes, quirks (Tolbert liked to bellow like a steer as he roamed the halls) gave the *News* flavor and personality. As did the immensely popular columnist Paul Crume, a droll, unpoliticized master of style and subtle narrative.

Segura buys into the tale of "angry, mean-spirited rants" that poisoned the political tone of Dallas. To which I am obliged to reply: balderdash, lady. The mean-spiritedness of the old *News* editorial page is an urban myth of the same dimensions and longevity as alligators-in-the-sewer. In any case, the new family team that began running the *News* in the 1980s brought in new submanagers who, over time, eradicated any reputation the paper might have had for personality, spirit, and flavor. No more conservative "ranting," that's for sure.

To what purpose? The goal might be described as unclear. If the idea was to increase circulation, that inspiration fell short. A whole lot of ex-subscribers quit because, as they explained, the new *News* bored them, never saying much that was worth hearing, never causing the blood to surge, the tear to well, or the corners of the mouth to crinkle in amusement.

The formula for staying alive in the new media age has, I would think, as much to do with content as with method and means. You're in the entertainment/information business. So entertain! Inform! Don't take for granted the kind of reader loyalty the sahibs of the old *Dallas News* enjoyed for so long. It doesn't exist. You have to compete for that: Fight for it, yell and punch for it. And then leave something worth taking away, to be chewed on thoughtfully by those who trusted you to instruct them. ♦

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Rose-Colored Milk

A sexual liberationist gets the sainthood treatment.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Sean Penn is no sweetheart. As an actor, he goes farther and deeper than any American performer of his generation in his meticulous depictions of flawed, unlikable, and dark-souled men. His three films as writer and director are portraits of obsessive self-destruction. And as one of Hollywood's most peculiar political journalists, he feels no compunction shilling for such worthies as Saddam Hussein and Hugo Chávez, perhaps because he has spent so much time humanizing monsters on the big screen that he feels compelled to do the same for real-life monsters.

Milk
Directed by Gus Van Sant

Who could have known that inside Penn's breast secretly beats the heart of a politically correct sentimentalist? His performance as Harvey Milk, the 1970s gay rights advocate who was murdered by a political rival inside San Francisco's City Hall, is an unblemished portrait of a martyred saint. For much of the movie, Penn wears a beatific smile that is so warm, kind, and unshadowed that he is almost unrecognizable. This is the kind of transformation that separates genuinely great actors from their peers, and Penn is nothing if not a genuinely great actor. He takes the Harvey Milk that was conjured up by tyro screenwriter Dustin Lance Black and lets that Harvey Milk take him over.

The thing is, the Harvey Milk of *Milk* is not the real Harvey Milk, and *Milk* the movie is a sham. The movie turns an incendiary, mau-mauing, take-no-prisoners radical of the 1970s into an ingenuous teddy bear. In the telling of the late gay journalist Randy Shilts—whose biography, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, is the unofficial inspiration for the movie—the real Milk was a smart, aggressive, purposefully offensive, press-savvy attention hound who believed the cause of gay rights would be advanced if there were riots in the streets of San Francisco. He was always on the hunt for a *casus belli*. By contrast, the cinematic Milk convinces the San Francisco police to let him organize an impromptu march to prevent a riot.

The real Milk was a sexual liberationist of a very specific 1970s type. "As homosexuals, we can't depend on the heterosexual model," Shilts quotes him as saying to one boyfriend in San Francisco by way of explaining why he had another boyfriend in Los Angeles. "We grow up with the heterosexual model, but we don't have to follow it. We should be developing our own lifestyle. There's no reason you can't love more than one person at a time." Shilts adds: "That ultimately was what his politics were all about, Harvey decided."

Milk was murdered three years before researchers identified the AIDS virus, which was the horrifying natural refutation of his doctrine (and which took the life of Scott Smith, the man with whom Milk moved to San Francisco from New York in 1970). It is understandable that screenwriter Black and director Gus Van Sant do not want to muddy their iconographic portrait with the inconvenient truth about Milk's polyamorous views or behavior. They no longer represent the vanguard of the effort to expand gay rights, which is now focused almost solely on the institution of marriage. But it is a distortion, and a significant one.

Milk was an extremist, far more comfortable on the margins than in the center, and committed to the proposition that the center should move to accommodate him. He went from being a Goldwater Republican to a hard leftist in a few years, and from being an insurance executive to a long-haired, bearded pseudo-hippie in less time than that. He despised rival leaders of the gay community in San Francisco he deemed insufficiently revolutionary. He was one of the early users of the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, throwing the Führer's name around to discredit and disqualify those who might have the temerity to disagree with him.

Whether Milk was a figure of any real significance during his lifetime is hard to say. He was one of the first openly gay elected officials in the United States, though the office he finally won—as a San Francisco supervisor, one of the city's 11 legislators—was not an important one. He was killed 11 months into his tenure by Dan White, one of his colleagues on the Board of Supervisors, and only after White had shot Mayor George Moscone dead. Milk's contrarian nature does not suggest he would have made a particularly effective working politician. He spent much of his time in office threatening Moscone with the loss of the "gay vote" if Moscone refused to do his bidding, which is the act more of an agitator than a legislator.

In an effort to make Milk seem like a central political player in the United States, the movie suggests he was at the forefront of the effort to defeat a California referendum that would have required the firing of all openly gay teachers. In point of fact, Milk's opposition was insignificant; the referendum was crushed because it was opposed on all sides, from Ronald Reagan to Jimmy Carter.

No matter. The Milk myth is now set. He was the nicest, sweetest, most caring, kindest, and most well-meaning man on the face of this earth. Harvey Milk is already one of the most famous American politicians of the past half-century, and now he will be even more so, particularly when Penn wins his second Oscar in February. The movie might win, too, even though it is really little more than a socially conscious television film of the 1980s, down to a late-night scene on the telephone during which Milk's former boyfriend tells him, "I'm proud of you." ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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"Embattled auto company chief executives scored some points with Congress by driving—instead of flying—to the hearings on a possible federal assistance package." —News item, December 4, 2008

Parody

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

CEMBER 9, 2008

CONGRESS APPROVES BAILOUT OF TOP THREE U.S. AUTOMAKERS

Auto Execs Promise Humility, Restraint, $5 Footlongs

By MICHELINE MAYNARD

WASHINGTON — In dire need of a massive bailout, the chief executives of Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler agreed to severe concessions in return for billions of dollars in federal assistance. Having been chastised for flying on corporate jets, the leaders of the auto industry learned their lesson on the return visit. Arriving by hybrid car last week, General Motors CEO Richard Wagoner told Congress he was serious about cutting costs—besides reducing his salary to one dollar, on his way to Washington, Wagoner stopped at a Quiznos for lunch.

Senator Richard Shelby, the ranking member on the banking committee, was not impressed. "I don't deny it's cheaper than dining at the Palm, but it's still more expensive than Subway. Have you seen those commercials? Five-dollar footlong. Remember that, gentlemen. From now on, you're eating $5 footlong sandwiches. That includes the meatball sub, the Spicy Italian, Veggie Delite, and others. The committee will provide you with a menu."

Chrysler CEO Robert Nardelli, for his part, agreed to stop airing Dodge Ram commercials on television. "Eight men, four races, one truck. What is happening here?" asked Senator Charles Schumer, referring to a recent "Ram Challenge" advertisement. "It's very loud, there are helicopters, explosions, and it all looks rather expensive." Nardelli was not sure himself: "Our ad guys told us it was a commercial about a contest taking place in a desert that would hopefully spin-off into a Mad Max-type reality show. This seemed like a great idea at the time."

Alan R. Mulally, Ford's chief executive officer, promised to curb spending for upcoming holiday receptions. "We will only be offering rail drinks and not the usual top shelf selections. That means Red Label and not Blue, Wild Turkey and not Woodford Reserve." Mr. Mulally appeared to choke up and grew emotional when Senator Robert Menendez suggested a cash bar instead. But before Mulally could respond, banking chairman Chris Dodd intervened: "Let's not get crazy here, Bob. Rail drinks are fine. Just be sure to buy enough mixers. Otherwise you could wake up the next morning with the biggest

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Guests at Ford Motor Company's end-of-the-year executive bash in Detroit last December 31 received party favors that included bars of gold bullion.

Bill Clinton Asked to Serve as Ambassador to Jamaica

Former President Was High on List

MICHAEL LUO

...apped to serve as ...ld us

in Kingston. Wasting no time, Mr. Clinton quickly packed his belongings and organized his ...off tapping

the weekly Standard
DECEMBER 15, 2008

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